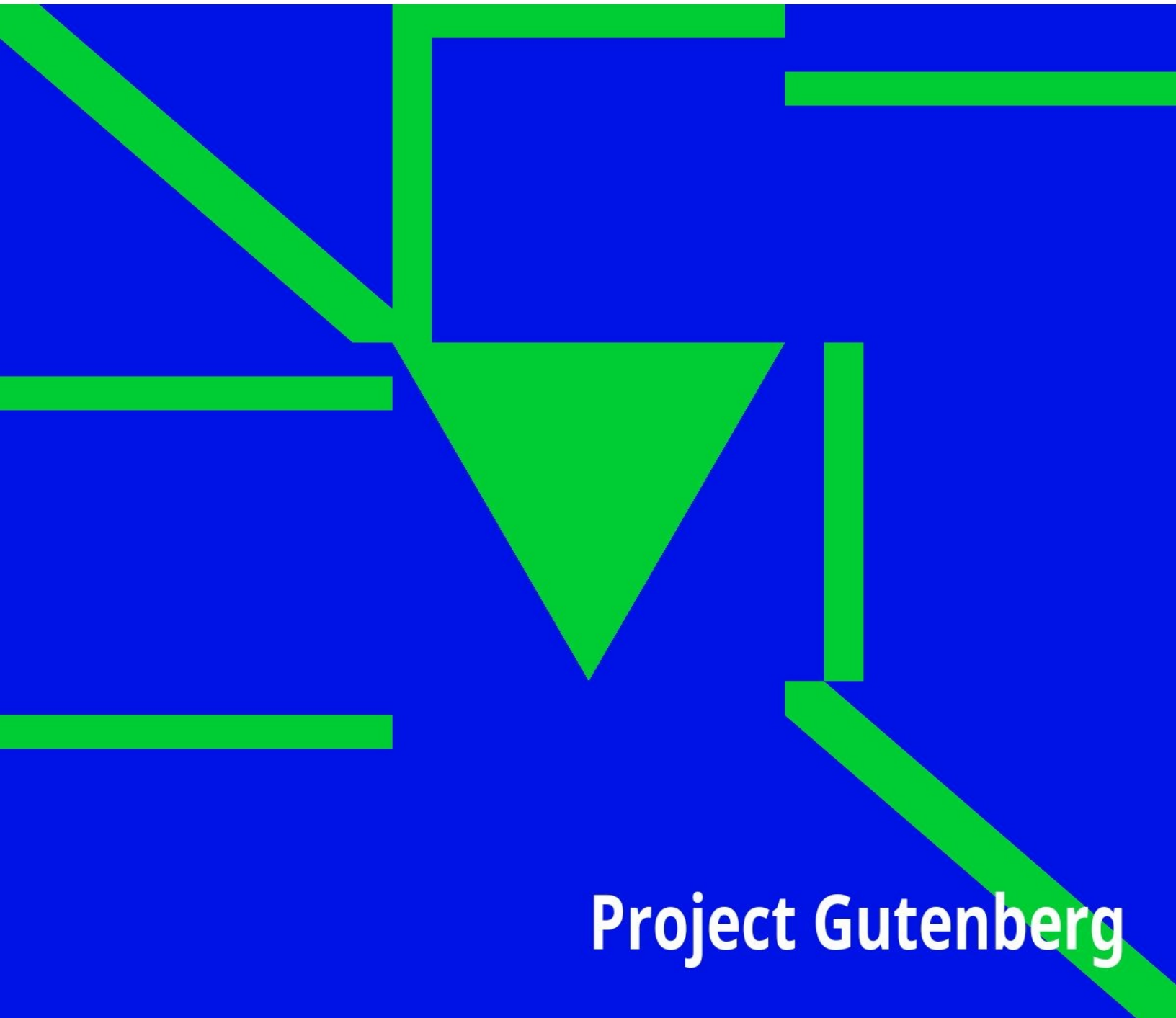
Modeste Mignon

Honoré de Balzac



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MODESTE MIGNON

By Honore De Balzac

Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley

DEDICATION

To a Polish Lady.

Daughter of an enslaved land, angel through love, witch through fancy, child by faith, aged by experience, man in brain, woman in heart, giant by hope, mother through sorrows, poet in thy dreams, —to *thee* belongs this book, in which thy love, thy fancy, thy experience, thy sorrow, thy hope, thy dreams, are the warp through which is shot a woof less brilliant than the poesy of thy soul, whose expression, when it shines upon thy countenance, is, to those who love thee, what the characters of a lost language are to scholars.

De Balzac.

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MODESTE MIGNON

CHAPTER I. THE CHALET

At the beginning of October, 1829, Monsieur Simon Babylas Latournelle, notary, was walking up from Havre to Ingouville, arm in arm with his son and accompanied by his wife, at whose side the head clerk of the lawyer's office, a little hunchback named Jean Butscha, trotted along like a page. When these four personages (two of whom came the same way every evening) reached the elbow of the road where it turns back upon itself like those called in Italy "cornice," the notary looked about to see if any one could overhear him either from the terrace above or the path beneath, and when he spoke he lowered his voice as a further precaution.

"Exupere," he said to his son, "you must try to carry out intelligently a little manoeuvre which I shall explain to you, but you are not to ask the meaning of it; and if you guess the meaning I command you to toss it into that Styx which every lawyer and every man who expects to have a hand in the government of his country is bound to keep within him for the secrets of others. After you have paid your respects and compliments to Madame and Mademoiselle Mignon, to Monsieur and Madame Dumay, and to Monsieur Gobenheim if he is at the Chalet, and as soon as quiet is restored, Monsieur Dumay will take you aside; you are then to look attentively at Mademoiselle Modeste (yes, I am willing to allow it) during the whole time he is speaking to you. My worthy friend will ask you to go out and take a walk; at the end of an hour, that is, about nine o'clock, you are to come back in a great hurry; try to puff as if you were out of breath, and whisper in Monsieur Dumay's ear, quite low, but so that Mademoiselle Modeste is sure to overhear you, these words: 'The young man has come.'"

Exupere was to start the next morning for Paris to begin the study of law. This impending departure had induced Latournelle to propose him to his friend Dumay as an accomplice in the important conspiracy which these directions indicate.

"Is Mademoiselle Modeste suspected of having a lover?" asked Butscha in a timid voice of Madame Latournelle.

"Hush, Butscha," she replied, taking her husband's arm.

Madame Latournelle, the daughter of a clerk of the supreme court, feels that her birth authorizes her to claim issue from a parliamentary family. This conviction explains why the lady, who is somewhat blotched as to complexion,

endeavors to assume in her own person the majesty of a court whose decrees are recorded in her father's pothooks. She takes snuff, holds herself as stiff as a ramrod, poses for a person of consideration, and resembles nothing so much as a mummy brought momentarily to life by galvanism. She tries to give high-bred tones to her sharp voice, and succeeds no better in doing that than in hiding her general lack of breeding. Her social usefulness seems, however, incontestable when we glance at the flower-bedecked cap she wears, at the false front frizzling around her forehead, at the gowns of her choice; for how could shopkeepers dispose of those products if there were no Madame Latournelle? All these absurdities of the worthy woman, who is truly pious and charitable, might have passed unnoticed, if nature, amusing herself as she often does by turning out these ludicrous creations, had not endowed her with the height of a drum-major, and thus held up to view the comicalities of her provincial nature. She has never been out of Havre; she believes in the infallibility of Havre; she proclaims herself Norman to the very tips of her fingers; she venerates her father, and adores her husband.

Little Latournelle was bold enough to marry this lady after she had attained the anti-matrimonial age of thirty-three, and what is more, he had a son by her. As he could have got the sixty thousand francs of her "dot" in several other ways, the public assigned his uncommon intrepidity to a desire to escape an invasion of the Minotaur, against whom his personal qualifications would have insufficiently protected him had he rashly dared his fate by bringing home a young and pretty wife. The fact was, however, that the notary recognized the really fine qualities of Mademoiselle Agnes (she was called Agnes) and reflected to himself that a woman's beauty is soon past and gone to a husband. As to the insignificant youth on whom the clerk of the court bestowed in baptism his Norman name of "Exupere," Madame Latournelle is still so surprised at becoming his mother, at the age of thirty-five years and seven months, that she would still provide him, if it were necessary, with her breast and her milk,—an hyperbole which alone can fully express her impassioned maternity. "How handsome he is, that son of mine!" she says to her little friend Modeste, as they walk to church, with the beautiful Exupere in front of them. "He is like you," Modeste Mignon answers, very much as she might have said, "What horrid weather!" This silhouette of Madame Latournelle is quite important as an accessory, inasmuch as for three years she has been the chaperone of the young girl against whom the notary and his friend Dumay are now plotting to set up what we have called, in the "Physiologie du Mariage," a "mouse-trap."

As for Latournelle, imagine a worthy little fellow as sly as the purest honor

and uprightness would allow him to be,—a man whom any stranger would take for a rascal at sight of his queer physiognomy, to which, however, the inhabitants of Havre were well accustomed. His eyesight, said to be weak, obliged the worthy man to wear green goggles for the protection of his eyes, which were constantly inflamed. The arch of each eyebrow, defined by a thin down of hair, surrounded the tortoise-shell rim of the glasses and made a couple of circles as it were, slightly apart. If you have never observed on the human face the effect produced by these circumferences placed one within the other, and separated by a hollow space or line, you can hardly imagine how perplexing such a face will be to you, especially if pale, hollow-cheeked, and terminating in a pointed chin like that of Mephistopheles,—a type which painters give to cats. This double resemblance was observable on the face of Babylas Latournelle. Above the atrocious green spectacles rose a bald crown, all the more crafty in expression because a wig, seemingly endowed with motion, let the white hairs show on all sides of it as it meandered crookedly across the forehead. An observer taking note of this excellent Norman, clothed in black and mounted on his two legs like a beetle on a couple of pins, and knowing him to be one of the most trustworthy of men, would have sought, without finding it, for the reason of such physical misrepresentation.

Jean Butscha, a natural son abandoned by his parents and taken care of by the clerk of the court and his daughter, and now, through sheer hard work, head-clerk to the notary, fed and lodged by his master, who gave him a salary of nine hundred francs, almost a dwarf, and with no semblance of youth,—Jean Butscha made Modeste his idol, and would willingly have given his life for hers. The poor fellow, whose eyes were hollowed beneath their heavy lids like the touch-holes of a cannon, whose head overweighted his body, with its shock of crisp hair, and whose face was pock-marked, had lived under pitying eyes from the time he was seven years of age. Is not that enough to explain his whole being? Silent, self-contained, pious, exemplary in conduct, he went his way over that vast tract of country named on the map of the heart Love-without-Hope, the sublime and arid steppes of Desire. Modeste had christened this grotesque little being her “Black Dwarf.” The nickname sent him to the pages of Walter Scott’s novel, and he one day said to Modeste: “Will you accept a rose against the evil day from your mysterious dwarf?” Modeste instantly sent the soul of her adorer to its humble mud-cabin with a terrible glance, such as young girls bestow on the men who cannot please them. Butscha’s conception of himself was lowly, and, like the wife of his master, he had never been out of Havre.

Perhaps it will be well, for the sake of those who have never seen that city, to

say a few words as to the present destination of the Latournelle family,—the head clerk being included in the latter term. Ingouville is to Havre what Montmartre is to Paris,—a high hill at the foot of which the city lies; with this difference, that the hill and the city are surrounded by the sea and the Seine, that Havre is helplessly circumscribed by enclosing fortifications, and, in short, that the mouth of the river, the harbor, and the docks present a very different aspect from the fifty thousand houses of Paris. At the foot of Montmartre an ocean of slate roofs lies in motionless blue billows; at Ingouville the sea is like the same roofs stirred by the wind. This eminence, or line of hills, which coasts the Seine from Rouen to the seashore, leaving a margin of valley land more or less narrow between itself and the river, and containing in its cities, its ravines, its vales, its meadows, veritable treasures of the picturesque, became of enormous value in and about Ingouville, after the year 1816, the period at which the prosperity of Havre began. This township has become since that time the Auteuil, the Ville-d'Avray, the Montmorency, in short, the suburban residence of the merchants of Havre. Here they build their houses on terraces around its ampitheatre of hills, and breathe the sea air laden with the fragrance of their splendid gardens. Here these bold speculators cast off the burden of their counting-rooms and the atmosphere of their city houses, which are built closely together without open spaces, often without court-yards,—a vice of construction with the increasing population of Havre, the inflexible line of the fortifications, and the enlargement of the docks has forced upon them. The result is, weariness of heart in Havre, cheerfulness and joy at Ingouville. The law of social development has forced up the suburb of Graville like a mushroom. It is to-day more extensive than Havre itself, which lies at the foot of its slopes like a serpent.

At the crest of the hill Ingouville has but one street, and (as in all such situations) the houses which overlook the river have an immense advantage over those on the other side of the road, whose view they obstruct, and which present the effect of standing on tip-toe to look over the opposing roofs. However, there exist here, as elsewhere, certain servitudes. Some houses standing at the summit have a finer position or possess legal rights of view which compel their opposite neighbors to keep their buildings down to a required height. Moreover, the openings cut in the capricious rock by roads which follow its declensions and make the ampitheatre habitable, give vistas through which some estates can see the city, or the river, or the sea. Instead of rising to an actual peak, the hill ends abruptly in a cliff. At the end of the street which follows the line of the summit, ravines appear in which a few villages are clustered (Sainte-Adresse and two or three other Saint-somethings) together with several creeks which murmur and

flow with the tides of the sea. These half-deserted slopes of Ingouville form a striking contrast to the terraces of fine villas which overlook the valley of the Seine. Is the wind on this side too strong for vegetation? Do the merchants shrink from the cost of terracing it? However this may be, the traveller approaching Havre on a steamer is surprised to find a barren coast and tangled gorges to the west of Ingouville, like a beggar in rags beside a perfumed and sumptuously apparelled rich man.

In 1829 one of the last houses looking toward the sea, and which in all probability stands about the centre of the Ingouville to-day, was called, and perhaps is still called, “the Chalet.” Originally it was a porter’s lodge with a trim little garden in front of it. The owner of the villa to which it belonged,—a mansion with park, gardens, aviaries, hot-houses, and lawns—took a fancy to put the little dwelling more in keeping with the splendor of his own abode, and he reconstructed it on the model of an ornamental cottage. He divided this cottage from his own lawn, which was bordered and set with flower-beds and formed the terrace of his villa, by a low wall along which he planted a concealing hedge. Behind the cottage (called, in spite of all his efforts to prevent it, the Chalet) were the orchards and kitchen gardens of the villa. The Chalet, without cows or dairy, is separated from the roadway by a wooden fence whose palings are hidden under a luxuriant hedge. On the other side of the road the opposite house, subject to a legal privilege, has a similar hedge and paling, so as to leave an unobstructed view of Havre to the Chalet.

This little dwelling was the torment of the present proprietor of the villa, Monsieur Vilquin; and here is the why and the wherefore. The original creator of the villa, whose sumptuous details cry aloud, “Behold our millions!” extended his park far into the country for the purpose, as he averred, of getting his gardeners out of his pockets; and so, when the Chalet was finished, none but a friend could be allowed to inhabit it. Monsieur Mignon, the next owner of the property, was very much attached to his cashier, Dumay, and the following history will prove that the attachment was mutual; to him therefore he offered the little dwelling. Dumay, a stickler for legal methods, insisted on signing a lease for three hundred francs for twelve years, and Monsieur Mignon willingly agreed, remarking,—

“My dear Dumay, remember, you have now bound yourself to live with me for twelve years.”

In consequence of certain events which will presently be related, the estates of Monsieur Mignon, formerly the richest merchant in Havre, were sold to Vilquin, one of his business competitors. In his joy at getting possession of the celebrated

villa Mignon, the latter forgot to demand the cancelling of the lease. Dumay, anxious not to hinder the sale, would have signed anything Vilquin required, but the sale once made, he held to his lease like a vengeance. And there he remained, in Vilquin's pocket as it were; at the heart of Vilquin's family life, observing Vilquin, irritating Vilquin,—in short, the gadfly of all the Vilquins. Every morning, when he looked out of his window, Vilquin felt a violent shock of annoyance as his eye lighted on the little gem of a building, the Chalet, which had cost sixty thousand francs and sparkled like a ruby in the sun. That comparison is very nearly exact. The architect has constructed the cottage of brilliant red brick pointed with white. The window-frames are painted of a lively green, the woodwork is brown verging on yellow. The roof overhangs by several feet. A pretty gallery, with open-worked balustrade, surmounts the lower floor and projects at the centre of the facade into a veranda with glass sides. The ground-floor has a charming salon and a dining-room, separated from each other by the landing of a staircase built of wood, designed and decorated with elegant simplicity. The kitchen is behind the dining-room, and the corresponding room back of the salon, formerly a study, is now the bedroom of Monsieur and Madame Dumay. On the upper floor the architect has managed to get two large bedrooms, each with a dressing-room, to which the veranda serves as a salon; and above this floor, under the eaves, which are tipped together like a couple of cards, are two servants' rooms with mansard roofs, each lighted by a circular window and tolerably spacious.

Vilquin has been petty enough to build a high wall on the side toward the orchard and kitchen garden; and in consequence of this piece of spite, the few square feet which the lease secured to the Chalet resembled a Parisian garden. The out-buildings, painted in keeping with the cottage, stood with their backs to the wall of the adjoining property.

The interior of this charming dwelling harmonized with its exterior. The salon, floored entirely with iron-wood, was painted in a style that suggested the beauties of Chinese lacquer. On black panels edged with gold, birds of every color, foliage of impossible greens, and fantastic oriental designs glowed and shimmered. The dining-room was entirely sheathed in Northern woods carved and cut in open-work like the beautiful Russian chalets. The little antechamber formed by the landing and the well of the staircase was painted in old oak to represent Gothic ornament. The bedrooms, hung with chintz, were charming in their costly simplicity. The study, where the cashier and his wife now slept, was panelled from top to bottom, on the walls and ceiling, like the cabin of a steamboat. These luxuries of his predecessor excited Vilquin's wrath. He would

fain have lodged his daughter and her husband in the cottage. This desire, well known to Dumay, will presently serve to illustrate the Breton obstinacy of the latter.

The entrance to the Chalet is by a little trellised iron door, the uprights of which, ending in lance-heads, show for a few inches above the fence and its hedge. The little garden, about as wide as the more pretentious lawn, was just now filled with flowers, roses, and dahlias of the choicest kind, and many rare products of the hot-houses, for (another Vilquinard grievance) the elegant little hot-house, a very whim of a hot-house, a hot-house representing dignity and style, belonged to the Chalet, and separated, or if you prefer, united it to the villa Vilquin. Dumay consoled himself for the toils of business in taking care of this hot-house, whose exotic treasures were one of Modeste's joys. The billiard-room of the villa Vilquin, a species of gallery, formerly communicated through an immense aviary with this hot-house. But after the building of the wall which deprived him of a view into the orchards, Dumay bricked up the door of communication. "Wall for wall!" he said.

In 1827 Vilquin offered Dumay a salary of six thousand francs, and ten thousand more as indemnity, if he would give up the lease. The cashier refused; though he had but three thousand francs from Gobenheim, a former clerk of his master. Dumay was a Breton transplanted by fate into Normandy. Imagine therefore the hatred conceived for the tenants of the Chalet by the Norman Vilquin, a man worth three millions! What criminal leze-million on the part of a cashier, to hold up to the eyes of such a man the impotence of his wealth! Vilquin, whose desperation in the matter made him the talk of Havre, had just proposed to give Dumay a pretty house of his own, and had again been refused. Havre itself began to grow uneasy at the man's obstinacy, and a good many persons explained it by the phrase, "Dumay is a Breton." As for the cashier, he thought Madame and Mademoiselle Mignon would be ill-lodged elsewhere. His two idols now inhabited a temple worthy of them; the sumptuous little cottage gave them a home, where these dethroned royalties could keep the semblance of majesty about them,—a species of dignity usually denied to those who have seen better days.

Perhaps as the story goes on, the reader will not regret having learned in advance a few particulars as to the home and the habitual companions of Modeste Mignon, for, at her age, people and things have as much influence upon the future life as a person's own character,—indeed, character often receives ineffaceable impressions from its surroundings.

CHAPTER II. A PORTRAIT FROM LIFE

From the manner with which the Latournelles entered the Chalet a stranger would readily have guessed that they came there every evening.

“Ah, you are here already,” said the notary, perceiving the young banker Gobenheim, a connection of Gobenheim-Keller, the head of the great banking house in Paris.

This young man with a livid face—a blonde of the type with black eyes, whose immovable glance has an indescribable fascination, sober in speech as in conduct, dressed in black, lean as a consumptive, but nevertheless vigorously framed—visited the family of his former master and the house of his cashier less from affection than from self-interest. Here they played whist at two sous a point; a dress-coat was not required; he accepted no refreshment except “eau sucree,” and consequently had no civilities to return. This apparent devotion to the Mignon family allowed it to be supposed that Gobenheim had a heart; it also released him from the necessity of going into the society of Havre and incurring useless expenses, thus upsetting the orderly economy of his domestic life. This disciple of the golden calf went to bed at half-past ten o’clock and got up at five in the morning. Moreover, being perfectly sure of Latournelle’s and Butscha’s discretion, he could talk over difficult business matters, obtain the advice of the notary gratis, and get an inkling of the real truth of the gossip of the street. This stolid gold-glutton (the epithet is Butscha’s) belonged by nature to the class of substances which chemistry terms absorbents. Ever since the catastrophe of the house of Mignon, where the Kellers had placed him to learn the principles of maritime commerce, no one at the Chalet had ever asked him to do the smallest thing, no matter what; his reply was too well known. The young fellow looked at Modeste precisely as he would have looked at a cheap lithograph.

“He’s one of the pistons of the big engine called ‘Commerce,’” said poor Butscha, whose clever mind made itself felt occasionally by such little sayings timidly jerked out.

The four Latournelles bowed with the most respectful deference to an old lady dressed in black velvet, who did not rise from the armchair in which she was seated, for the reason that both eyes were covered with the yellow film produced by cataract. Madame Mignon may be sketched in one sentence. Her august countenance of the mother of a family attracted instant notice as that of one

whose irreproachable life defies the assaults of destiny, which nevertheless makes her the target of its arrows and a member of the unnumbered tribe of Niobes. Her blonde wig, carefully curled and well arranged upon her head, became the cold white face which resembled that of some burgomaster's wife painted by Hals or Mirevelt. The extreme neatness of her dress, the velvet boots, the lace collar, the shawl evenly folded and put on, all bore testimony to the solicitous care which Modeste bestowed upon her mother.

When silence was, as the notary had predicted, restored in the pretty salon, Modeste, sitting beside her mother, for whom she was embroidering a kerchief, became for an instant the centre of observation. This curiosity, barely veiled by the commonplace salutations and inquiries of the visitors, would have revealed even to an indifferent person the existence of the domestic plot to which Modeste was expected to fall a victim; but Gobenheim, more than indifferent, noticed nothing, and proceeded to light the candles on the card-table. The behavior of Dumay made the whole scene terrifying to Butscha, to the Latournelles, and above all to Madame Dumay, who knew her husband to be capable of firing a pistol at Modeste's lover as coolly as though he were a mad dog.

After dinner that day the cashier had gone to walk followed by two magnificent Pyrenees hounds, whom he suspected of betraying him, and therefore left in charge of a farmer, a former tenant of Monsieur Mignon. On his return, just before the arrival of the Latournelles, he had taken his pistols from his bed's head and placed them on the chimney-piece, concealing this action from Modeste. The young girl took no notice whatever of these preparations, singular as they were.

Though short, thick-set, pockmarked, and speaking always in a low voice as if listening to himself, this Breton, a former lieutenant in the Guard, showed the evidence of such resolution, such sang-froid on his face that throughout life, even in the army, no one had ever ventured to trifle with him. His little eyes, of a calm blue, were like bits of steel. His ways, the look on his face, his speech, his carriage, were all in keeping with the short name of Dumay. His physical strength, well-known to every one, put him above all danger of attack. He was able to kill a man with a blow of his fist, and had performed that feat at Bautzen, where he found himself, unarmed, face to face with a Saxon at the rear of his company. At the present moment the usually firm yet gentle expression of the man's face had risen to a sort of tragic sublimity; his lips were pale as the rest of his face, indicating a tumult within him mastered by his Breton will; a slight sweat, which every one noticed and guessed to be cold, moistened his brow. The

notary knew but too well that these signs might result in a drama before the criminal courts. In fact the cashier was playing a part in connection with Modeste Mignon, which involved to his mind sentiments of honor and loyalty of far greater importance than mere social laws; and his present conduct proceeded from one of those compacts which, in case disaster came of it, could be judged only in a higher court than one of earth. The majority of dramas lie really in the ideas which we make to ourselves about things. Events which seem to us dramatic are nothing more than subjects which our souls convert into tragedy or comedy according to the bent of our characters.

Madame Latournelle and Madame Dumay, who were appointed to watch Modeste, had a certain assumed stiffness of demeanor and a quiver in their voices, which the suspected party did not notice, so absorbed was she in her embroidery. Modeste laid each thread of cotton with a precision that would have made an ordinary workwoman desperate. Her face expressed the pleasure she took in the smooth petals of the flower she was working. The dwarf, seated between his mistress and Gobenheim, restrained his emotion, trying to find means to approach Modeste and whisper a word of warning in her ear.

By taking a position in front of Madame Mignon, Madame Latournelle, with the diabolical intelligence of conscientious duty, had isolated Modeste. Madame Mignon, whose blindness always made her silent, was even paler than usual, showing plainly that she was aware of the test to which her daughter was about to be subjected. Perhaps at the last moment she revolted from the stratagem, necessary as it might seem to her. Hence her silence; she was weeping inwardly. Exupere, the spring of the trap, was wholly ignorant of the piece in which he was to play a part. Gobenheim, by reason of his character, remained in a state of indifference equal to that displayed by Modeste. To a spectator who understood the situation, this contrast between the ignorance of some and the palpitating interest of others would have seemed quite poetic. Nowadays romance-writers arrange such effects; and it is quite within their province to do so, for nature in all ages takes the liberty to be stronger than they. In this instance, as you will see, nature, social nature, which is a second nature within nature, amused herself by making truth more interesting than fiction; just as mountain torrents describe curves which are beyond the skill of painters to convey, and accomplish giant deeds in displacing or smoothing stones which are the wonder of architects and sculptors.

It was eight o’clock. At that season twilight was still shedding its last gleams; there was not a cloud in the sky; the balmy air caressed the earth, the flowers gave forth their fragrance, the steps of pedestrians turning homeward sounded

along the gravelly road, the sea shone like a mirror, and there was so little wind that the wax candles upon the card-tables sent up a steady flame, although the windows were wide open. This salon, this evening, this dwelling—what a frame for the portrait of the young girl whom these persons were now studying with the profound attention of a painter in presence of the Margharita Doni, one of the glories of the Pitti palace. Modeste,—blossom enclosed, like that of Catullus,—was she worth all these precautions?

You have seen the cage; behold the bird! Just twenty years of age, slender and delicate as the sirens which English designers invent for their “Books of Beauty,” Modeste was, like her mother before her, the captivating embodiment of a grace too little understood in France, where we choose to call it sentimentality, but which among German women is the poetry of the heart coming to the surface of the being and spending itself—in affectations if the owner is silly, in divine charms of manner if she is “spirituelle” and intelligent. Remarkable for her pale golden hair, Modeste belonged to the type of woman called, perhaps in memory of Eve, the celestial blonde; whose satiny skin is like a silk paper applied to the flesh, shuddering at the winter of a cold look, expanding in the sunshine of a loving glance,—teaching the hand to be jealous of the eye. Beneath her hair, which was soft and feathery and worn in many curls, the brow, which might have been traced by a compass so pure was its modelling, shone forth discreet, calm to placidity, and yet luminous with thought: when and where could another be found so transparently clear or more exquisitely smooth? It seemed, like a pearl, to have its orient. The eyes, of a blue verging on gray and limpid as the eyes of a child, had all the mischief, all the innocence of childhood, and they harmonized well with the arch of the eyebrows, faintly indicated by lines like those made with a brush on Chinese faces. This candor of the soul was still further evidenced around the eyes, in their corners, and about the temples, by pearly tints threaded with blue, the special privilege of these delicate complexions. The face, whose oval Raphael so often gave to his Madonnas, was remarkable for the sober and virginal tone of the cheeks, soft as a Bengal rose, upon which the long lashes of the diaphanous eyelids cast shadows that were mingled with light. The throat, bending as she worked, too delicate perhaps, and of milky whiteness, recalled those vanishing lines that Leonardo loved. A few little blemishes here and there, like the patches of the eighteenth century, proved that Modeste was indeed a child of earth, and not a creation dreamed of in Italy by the angelic school. Her lips, delicate yet full, were slightly mocking and somewhat sensuous; the waist, which was supple and yet not fragile, had no terrors for maternity, like those of girls who seek

beauty by the fatal pressure of a corset. Steel and dimity and lacings defined but did not create the serpentine lines of the elegant figure, graceful as that of a young poplar swaying in the wind.

A pearl-gray dress with crimson trimmings, made with a long waist, modestly outlined the bust and covered the shoulders, still rather thin, with a chemisette which left nothing to view but the first curves of the throat where it joined the shoulders. From the aspect of the young girl's face, at once ethereal and intelligent, where the delicacy of a Greek nose with its rosy nostrils and firm modelling marked something positive and defined; where the poetry enthroned upon an almost mystic brow seemed belied at times by the pleasure-loving expression of the mouth; where candor claimed the depths profound and varied of the eye, and disputed them with a spirit of irony that was trained and educated,—from all these signs an observer would have felt that this young girl, with the keen, alert ear that waked at every sound, with a nostril open to catch the fragrance of the celestial flower of the Ideal, was destined to be the battle-ground of a struggle between the poesies of the dawn and the labors of the day; between fancy and reality, the spirit and the life. Modeste was a pure young girl, inquisitive after knowledge, understanding her destiny, and filled with chastity, —the Virgin of Spain rather than the Madonna of Raphael.

She raised her head when she heard Dumay say to Exupere, "Come here, young man." Seeing them together in the corner of the salon she supposed they were talking of some commission in Paris. Then she looked at the friends who surrounded her, as if surprised by their silence, and exclaimed in her natural manner, "Why are you not playing?"—with a glance at the green table which the imposing Madame Latournelle called the "altar."

"Yes, let us play," said Dumay, having sent off Exupere.

"Sit there, Butscha," said Madame Latournelle, separating the head-clerk from the group around Madame Mignon and her daughter by the whole width of the table.

"And you, come over here," said Dumay to his wife, making her sit close by him.

Madame Dumay, a little American about thirty-six years of age, wiped her eyes furtively; she adored Modeste, and feared a catastrophe.

"You are not very lively this evening," remarked Modeste.

"We are playing," said Gobenheim, sorting his cards.

No matter how interesting this situation may appear, it can be made still more so by explaining Dumay's position towards Modeste. If the brevity of this

explanation makes it seem rather dry, the reader must pardon its dryness in view of our desire to get through with these preliminaries as speedily as possible, and the necessity of relating the main circumstances which govern all dramas.

CHAPTER III. PRELIMINARIES

Jean Francois Bernard Dumay, born at Vannes, started as a soldier for the army of Italy in 1799. His father, president of the revolutionary tribunal of that town, had displayed so much energy in his office that the place had become too hot to hold the son when the parent, a pettifogging lawyer, perished on the scaffold after the ninth Thermidor. On the death of his mother, who died of the grief this catastrophe occasioned, Jean sold all that he possessed and rushed to Italy at the age of twenty-two, at the very moment when our armies were beginning to yield. On the way he met a young man in the department of Var, who for reasons analogous to his own was in search of glory, believing a battle-field less perilous than his own Provence. Charles Mignon, the last scion of an ancient family, which gave its name to a street in Paris and to a mansion built by Cardinal Mignon, had a shrewd and calculating father, whose one idea was to save his feudal estate of La Bastie in the Comtat from the claws of the Revolution. Like all timid folk of that day, the Comte de La Bastie, now citizen Mignon, found it more wholesome to cut off other people’s heads than to let his own be cut off. The sham terrorist disappeared after the 9th Thermidor, and was then inscribed on the list of emigres. The estate of La Bastie was sold; the towers and bastions of the old castle were pulled down, and citizen Mignon was soon after discovered at Orleans and put to death with his wife and all his children except Charles, whom he had sent to find a refuge for the family in the Upper Alps.

Horrorstruck at the news, Charles waited for better times in a valley of Mont Genevra; and there he remained till 1799, subsisting on a few louis which his father had put into his hand at starting. Finally, when twenty-three years of age, and without other fortune than his fine presence and that southern beauty which, when it reaches perfection, may be called sublime (of which Antinous, the favorite of Adrian, is the type), Charles resolved to wager his Provencal audacity —taking it, like many another youth, for a vocation—on the red cloth of war. On his way to the base of the army at Nice he met the Breton. The pair became intimate, partly from the contrasts in their characters; they drank from the same cup at the wayside torrents, broke the same biscuit, and were both made sergeants at the peace which followed the battle of Marengo.

When the war recommenced, Charles Mignon was promoted into the cavalry

and lost sight of his comrade. In 1812 the last of the Mignon de La Bastie was an officer of the Legion of honor and major of a regiment of cavalry. Taken prisoner by the Russians he was sent, like so many others, to Siberia. He made the journey in company with another prisoner, a poor lieutenant, in whom he recognized his old friend Jean Dumay, brave, neglected, undecorated, unhappy, like a million of other woollen epaulets, rank and file—that canvas of men on which Napoleon painted the picture of the Empire. While in Siberia, the lieutenant-colonel, to kill time, taught writing and arithmetic to the Breton, whose early education had seemed a useless waste of time to Pere Scevola. Charles found in the old comrade of his marching days one of those rare hearts into which a man can pour his griefs while telling his joys.

The young Provencal had met the fate which attends all handsome bachelors. In 1804, at Frankfort on the Main, he was adored by Bettina Wallenrod, only daughter of a banker, and he married her with all the more enthusiasm because she was rich and a noted beauty, while he was only a lieutenant with no prospects but the extremely problematical future of a soldier of fortune of that day. Old Wallenrod, a decayed German baron (there is always a baron in a German bank) delighted to know that the handsome lieutenant was the sole representative of the Mignon de La Bastie, approved the love of the blonde Bettina, whose beauty an artist (at that time there really was one in Frankfort) had lately painted as an ideal head of Germany. Wallenrod invested enough money in the French funds to give his daughter thirty thousand francs a year, and settled it on his anticipated grandsons, naming them counts of La Bastie-Wallenrod. This “dot” made only a small hole in his cash-box, the value of money being then very low. But the Empire, pursuing a policy often attempted by other debtors, rarely paid its dividends; and Charles was rather alarmed at this investment, having less faith than his father-in-law in the imperial eagle. The phenomenon of belief, or of admiration which is ephemeral belief, is not so easily maintained when in close quarters with the idol. The mechanic distrusts the machine which the traveller admires; and the officers of the army might be called the stokers of the Napoleonic engine,—if, indeed, they were not its fuel.

However, the Baron Wallenrod-Tustall-Bartenstild promised to come if necessary to the help of the household. Charles loved Bettina Wallenrod as much as she loved him, and that is saying a good deal; but when a Provencal is moved to enthusiasm all his feelings and attachments are genuine and natural. And how could he fail to adore that blonde beauty, escaping, as it were, from the canvas of Durer, gifted with an angelic nature and endowed with Frankfort wealth? The pair had four children, of whom only two daughters survived at the time when he

poured his griefs into the Breton's heart. Dumay loved these little ones without having seen them, solely through the sympathy so well described by Charlet, which makes a soldier the father of every child. The eldest, named Bettina Caroline, was born in 1805; the other, Marie Modeste, in 1808. The unfortunate lieutenant-colonel, long without tidings of these cherished darlings, was sent, at the peace of 1814, across Russia and Prussia on foot, accompanied by the lieutenant. No difference of epaulets could count between the two friends, who reached Frankfort just as Napoleon was disembarking at Cannes.

Charles found his wife in Frankfort, in mourning for her father, who had always idolized her and tried to keep a smile upon her lips, even by his dying bed. Old Wallenrod was unable to survive the disasters of the Empire. At seventy years of age he speculated in cottons, relying on the genius of Napoleon without comprehending that genius is quite as often beyond as at the bottom of current events. The old man had purchased nearly as many bales of cotton as the Emperor had lost men during his magnificent campaign in France. "I tie in goddon," said the father to the daughter, a father of the Goriot type, striving to quiet a grief which distressed him. "I owe no mann anything—" and he died, still trying to speak to his daughter in the language that she loved.

Thankful to have saved his wife and daughters from the general wreck, Charles Mignon returned to Paris, where the Emperor made him lieutenant-colonel in the cuirassiers of the Guard and commander of the Legion of honor. The colonel dreamed of being count and general after the first victory. Alas! that hope was quenched in the blood of Waterloo. The colonel, slightly wounded, retired to the Loire, and left Tours before the disbandment of the army.

In the spring of 1816 Charles sold his wife's property out of the funds to the amount of nearly four hundred thousand francs, intending to seek his fortune in America, and abandon his own country where persecution was beginning to lay a heavy hand on the soldiers of Napoleon. He went to Havre accompanied by Dumay, whose life he had saved at Waterloo by taking him on the crupper of his saddle in the hurly-burly of the retreat. Dumay shared the opinions and the anxieties of his colonel; the poor fellow idolized the two little girls and followed Charles like a spaniel. The latter, confident that the habit of obedience, the discipline of subordination, and the honesty and affection of the lieutenant would make him a useful as well as a faithful retainer, proposed to take him with him in a civil capacity. Dumay was only too happy to be adopted into the family, to which he resolved to cling like the mistletoe to an oak.

While waiting for an opportunity to embark, at the same time making choice of a ship and reflecting on the chances offered by the various ports for which

they sailed, the colonel heard much talk about the brilliant future which the peace seemed to promise to Havre. As he listened to these conversations among the merchants, he foresaw the means of fortune, and without loss of time he set about making himself the owner of landed property, a banker, and a shipping-merchant. He bought land and houses in the town, and despatched a vessel to New York freighted with silks purchased in Lyons at reduced prices. He sent Dumay on the ship as his agent; and when the latter returned, after making a double profit by the sale of the silks and the purchase of cottons at a low valuation, he found the colonel installed with his family in the handsomest house in the rue Royale, and studying the principles of banking with the prodigious activity and intelligence of a native of Provence.

This double operation of Dumay's was worth a fortune to the house of Mignon. The colonel purchased the villa at Ingouville and rewarded his agent with the gift of a modest little house in the rue Royale. The poor toiler had brought back from New York, together with his cottons, a pretty little wife, attracted it would seem by his French nature. Miss Grummer was worth about four thousand dollars (twenty thousand francs), which sum Dumay placed with his colonel, to whom he now became an alter ego. In a short time he learned to keep his patron's books, a science which, to use his own expression, pertains to the sergeant-majors of commerce. The simple-hearted soldier, whom fortune had forgotten for twenty years, thought himself the happiest man in the world as the owner of the little house (which his master's liberality had furnished), with twelve hundred francs a year from money in the funds, and a salary of three thousand six hundred. Never in his dreams had Lieutenant Dumay hoped for a situation so good as this; but greater still was the satisfaction he derived from the knowledge that his lucky enterprise had been the pivot of good fortune to the richest commercial house in Havre.

Madame Dumay, a rather pretty little American, had the misfortune to lose all her children at their birth; and her last confinement was so disastrous as to deprive her of the hope of any other. She therefore attached herself to the two little Mignons, whom Dumay himself loved, or would have loved, even better than his own children had they lived. Madame Dumay, whose parents were farmers accustomed to a life of economy, was quite satisfied to receive only two thousand four hundred francs of her own and her household expenses; so that every year Dumay laid by two thousand and some extra hundreds with the house of Mignon. When the yearly accounts were made up the colonel always added something to this little store by way of acknowledging the cashier's services, until in 1824 the latter had a credit of fifty-eight thousand francs. In was then

that Charles Mignon, Comte de La Bastie, a title he never used, crowned his cashier with the final happiness of residing at the Chalet, where at the time when this story begins Madame Mignon and her daughter were living in obscurity.

The deplorable state of Madame Mignon's health was caused in part by the catastrophe to which the absence of her husband was due. Grief had taken three years to break down the docile German woman; but it was a grief that gnawed at her heart like a worm at the core of a sound fruit. It is easy to reckon up its obvious causes. Two children, dying in infancy, had a double grave in a soul that could never forget. The exile of her husband to Siberia was to such a woman a daily death. The failure of the rich house of Wallenrod, and the death of her father, leaving his coffers empty, was to Bettina, then uncertain about the fate of her husband, a terrible blow. The joy of Charles's return came near killing the tender German flower. After that the second fall of the Empire and the proposed expatriation acted on her feelings like a renewed attack of the same fever. At last, however, after ten years of continual prosperity, the comforts of her house, which was the finest in Havre, the dinners, balls, and fetes of a prosperous merchant, the splendors of the villa Mignon, the unbounded respect and consideration enjoyed by her husband, his absolute affection, giving her an unrivalled love in return for her single-minded love for him,—all these things brought the woman back to life. At the moment when her doubts and fears at last left her, when she could look forward to the bright evening of her stormy life, a hidden catastrophe, buried in the heart of the family, and of which we shall presently make mention, came as the precursor of renewed trials.

In January, 1826, on the day when Havre had unanimously chosen Charles Mignon as its deputy, three letters, arriving from New York, Paris, and London, fell with the destruction of a hammer upon the crystal palace of his prosperity. In an instant ruin like a vulture swooped down upon their happiness, just as the cold fell in 1812 upon the grand army in Russia. One night sufficed Charles Mignon to decide upon his course, and he spent it in settling his accounts with Dumay. All he owned, not excepting his furniture, would just suffice to pay his creditors.

"Havre shall never see me doing nothing," said the colonel to the lieutenant. "Dumay, I take your sixty thousand francs at six per cent."

"Three, my colonel."

"At nothing, then," cried Mignon, peremptorily; "you shall have your share in the profits of what I now undertake. The 'Modeste,' which is no longer mine, sails to-morrow, and I sail in her. I commit to you my wife and daughter. I shall not write. No news must be taken as good news."

Dumay, always subordinate, asked no questions of his colonel. “I think,” he said to Latournelle with a knowing little glance, “that my colonel has a plan laid out.”

The following day at dawn he accompanied his master on board the “Modeste” bound for Constantinople. There, on the poop of the vessel, the Breton said to the Provencal,—

“What are your last commands, my colonel?”

“That no man shall enter the Chalet,” cried the father with strong emotion. “Dumay, guard my last child as though you were a bull-dog. Death to the man who seduces another daughter! Fear nothing, not even the scaffold—I will be with you.”

“My colonel, go in peace. I understand you. You shall find Mademoiselle Mignon on your return such as you now give her to me, or I shall be dead. You know me, and you know your Pyrenees hounds. No man shall reach your daughter. Forgive me for troubling you with words.”

The two soldiers clasped arms like men who had learned to understand each other in the solitudes of Siberia.

On the same day the Havre “Courier” published the following terrible, simple, energetic, and honorable notice:—

“The house of Charles Mignon suspends payment. But the undersigned, assignees of the estate, undertake to pay all liabilities. On and after this date, holders of notes may obtain the usual discount. The sale of the landed estates will fully cover all current indebtedness.

“This notice is issued for the honor of the house, and to prevent any disturbance in the money-market of this town.

“Monsieur Charles Mignon sailed this morning on the ‘Modeste’ for Asia Minor, leaving full powers with the undersigned to sell his whole property, both landed and personal.

“DUMAY, assignee of the Bank accounts,
LATOURNELLE, notary, assignee of the city and villa property,
GOBENHEIM, assignee of the commercial property.”

Latournelle owed his prosperity to the kindness of Monsieur Mignon, who lent him one hundred thousand francs in 1817 to buy the finest law practice in Havre. The poor man, who had no pecuniary means, was nearly forty years of age and saw no prospect of being other than head-clerk for the rest of his days. He was the only man in Havre whose devotion could be compared with Dumay’s. As for Gobenheim, he profited by the liquidation to get a part of Monsieur Mignon’s business, which lifted his own little bank into prominence.

While unanimous regrets for the disaster were expressed in counting-rooms, on the wharves, and in private houses, where praises of a man so irreproachable, honorable, and beneficent filled every mouth, Latournelle and Dumay, silent and active as ants, sold land, turned property into money, paid the debts, and settled up everything. Vilquin showed a good deal of generosity in purchasing the villa, the town-house, and a farm; and Latournelle made the most of his liberality by getting a good price out of him. Society wished to show civilities to Madame and Mademoiselle Mignon; but they had already obeyed the father’s last wishes and taken refuge in the Chalet, where they went on the very morning of his departure, the exact hour of which had been concealed from them. Not to be shaken in his resolution by his grief at parting, the brave man said farewell to his wife and daughter while they slept. Three hundred visiting cards were left at the house. A fortnight later, just as Charles had predicted, complete forgetfulness settled down upon the Chalet, and proved to these women the wisdom and dignity of his command.

Dumay sent agents to represent his master in New York, Paris, and London, and followed up the assignments of the three banking-houses whose failure had caused the ruin of the Havre house, thus realizing five hundred thousand francs between 1826 and 1828, an eighth of Charles’s whole fortune; then, according to the latter’s directions given on the night of his departure, he sent that sum to New York through the house of Mongenod to the credit of Monsieur Charles

Mignon. All this was done with military obedience, except in a matter of withholding thirty thousand francs for the personal expenses of Madame and Mademoiselle Mignon as the colonel had ordered him to do, but which Dumay did not do. The Breton sold his own little house for twenty thousand francs, which sum he gave to Madame Mignon, believing that the more capital he sent to his colonel the sooner the latter would return.

“He might perish for the want of thirty thousand francs,” Dumay remarked to Latournelle, who bought the little house at its full value, where an apartment was always kept ready for the inhabitants of the Chalet.

CHAPTER IV. A SIMPLE STORY

Such was the result to the celebrated house of Mignon at Havre of the crisis of 1825-26, which convulsed many of the principal business centres in Europe and caused the ruin of several Parisian bankers, among them (as those who remember that crisis will recall) the president of the chamber of commerce.

We can now understand how this great disaster, coming suddenly at the close of ten years of domestic happiness, might well have been the death of Bettina Mignon, again separated from her husband and ignorant of his fate,—to her as adventurous and perilous as the exile to Siberia. But the grief which was dragging her to the grave was far other than these visible sorrows. The caustic that was slowly eating into her heart lay beneath a stone in the little graveyard of Ingouville, on which was inscribed:—

BETTINA CAROLINE MIGNON

Died aged twenty-two.

Pray for her.

This inscription is to the young girl whom it covered what many another epitaph has been for the dead lying beneath them,—a table of contents to a hidden book. Here is the book, in its dreadful brevity; and it will explain the oath exacted and taken when the colonel and the lieutenant bade each other farewell.

A young man of charming appearance, named Charles d’Estourny, came to Havre for the commonplace purpose of being near the sea, and there he saw Bettina Mignon. A “soi-disant” fashionable Parisian is never without introductions, and he was invited at the instance of a friend of the Mignons to a fete given at Ingouville. He fell in love with Bettina and with her fortune, and in three months he had done the work of seduction and enticed her away. The father of a family of daughters should no more allow a young man whom he does not know to enter his home than he should leave books and papers lying about which he has not read. A young girl’s innocence is like milk, which a small matter turns sour,—a clap of thunder, an evil odor, a hot day, a mere breath.

When Charles Mignon read his daughter’s letter of farewell he instantly despatched Madame Dumay to Paris. The family gave out that a journey to another climate had suddenly been advised for Caroline by their physician; and the physician himself sustained the excuse, though unable to prevent some gossip in the society of Havre. “Such a vigorous young girl! with the complexion

of a Spaniard, and that black hair!—she consumptive!" "Yes, they say she committed some imprudence." "Ah, ah!" cried a Vilquin. "I am told she came back bathed in perspiration after riding on horseback, and drank iced water; at least, that is what Dr. Troussenard says."

By the time Madame Dumay returned to Havre the catastrophe of the failure had taken place, and society paid no further attention to the absence of Bettina or the return of the cashier's wife. At the beginning of 1827 the newspapers rang with the trial of Charles d'Estourny, who was found guilty of cheating at cards. The young corsair escaped into foreign parts without taking thought of Mademoiselle Mignon, who was of little value to him since the failure of the bank. Bettina heard of his infamous desertion and of her father's ruin almost at the same time. She returned home struck by death, and wasted away in a short time at the Chalet. Her death at least protected her reputation. The illness that Monsieur Mignon alleged to be the cause of her absence, and the doctor's order which sent her to Nice were now generally believed. Up to the last moment the mother hoped to save her daughter's life. Bettina was her darling and Modeste was the father's. There was something touching in the two preferences. Bettina was the image of Charles, just as Modeste was the reproduction of her mother. Both parents continued their love for each other in their children. Bettina, a daughter of Provence, inherited from her father the beautiful hair, black as a raven's wing, which distinguishes the women of the South, the brown eye, almond-shaped and brilliant as a star, the olive tint, the velvet skin as of some golden fruit, the arched instep, and the Spanish waist from which the short basque skirt fell crisply. Both mother and father were proud of the charming contrast between the sisters. "A devil and an angel!" they said to each other, laughing, little thinking it prophetic.

After weeping for a month in the solitude of her chamber, where she admitted no one, the mother came forth at last with injured eyes. Before losing her sight altogether she persisted, against the wishes of her friends, in visiting her daughter's grave, on which she riveted her gaze in contemplation. That image remained vivid in the darkness which now fell upon her, just as the red spectrum of an object shines in our eyes when we close them in full daylight. This terrible and double misfortune made Dumay, not less devoted, but more anxious about Modeste, now the only daughter of the father who was unaware of his loss. Madame Dumay, idolizing Modeste, like other women deprived of their children, cast her motherliness about the girl,—yet without disregarding the commands of her husband, who distrusted female intimacies. Those commands were brief. "If any man, of any age, or any rank," Dumay said, "speaks to

Modeste, ogles her, makes love to her, he is a dead man. I'll blow his brains out and give myself to the authorities; my death may save her. If you don't wish to see my head cut off, do you take my place in watching her when I am obliged to go out."

For the last three years Dumay had examined his pistols every night. He seemed to have put half the burden of his oath upon the Pyrenean hounds, two animals of uncommon sagacity. One slept inside the Chalet, the other was stationed in a kennel which he never left, and where he never barked; but terrible would have been the moment had the pair made their teeth meet in some unknown adventurer.

We can now imagine the sort of life led by mother and daughter at the Chalet. Monsieur and Madame Latournelle, often accompanied by Gobenheim, came to call and play whist with Dumay nearly every evening. The conversation turned on the gossip of Havre and the petty events of provincial life. The little company separated between nine and ten o'clock. Modeste put her mother to bed, and together they said their prayers, kept up each other's courage, and talked of the dear absent one, the husband and father. After kissing her mother for good-night, the girl went to her own room about ten o'clock. The next morning she prepared her mother for the day with the same care, the same prayers, the same prattle. To her praise be it said that from the day when the terrible infirmity deprived her mother of a sense, Modeste had been like a servant to her, displaying at all times the same solicitude; never wearying of the duty, never thinking it monotonous. Such constant devotion, combined with a tenderness rare among young girls, was thoroughly appreciated by those who witnessed it. To the Latournelle family, and to Monsieur and Madame Dumay, Modeste was, in soul, the pearl of price.

On sunny days, between breakfast and dinner, Madame Mignon and Madame Dumay took a little walk toward the sea. Modeste accompanied them, for two arms were needed to support the blind mother. About a month before the scene to which this explanation is a parenthesis, Madame Mignon had taken counsel with her friends, Madame Latournelle, the notary, and Dumay, while Madame Dumay carried Modeste in another direction for a longer walk.

"Listen to what I have to say," said the blind woman. "My daughter is in love. I feel it; I see it. A singular change has taken place within her, and I do not see how it is that none of you have perceived it."

"In the name of all that's honorable—" cried the lieutenant.

"Don't interrupt me, Dumay. For the last two months Modeste has taken as

much care of her personal appearance as if she expected to meet a lover. She has grown extremely fastidious about her shoes; she wants to set off her pretty feet; she scolds Madame Gobet, the shoemaker. It is the same thing with her milliner. Some days my poor darling is absorbed in thought, evidently expectant, as if waiting for some one. Her voice has curt tones when she answers a question, as though she were interrupted in the current of her thoughts and secret expectations. Then, if this awaited lover has come—"

"Good heavens!"

"Sit down, Dumay," said the blind woman. "Well, then Modeste is gay. Oh! she is not gay to your sight; you cannot catch these gradations; they are too delicate for eyes that see only the outside of nature. Her gaiety is betrayed to me by the tones of her voice, by certain accents which I alone can catch and understand. Modeste then, instead of sitting still and thoughtful, gives vent to a wild, inward activity by impulsive movements,—in short, she is happy. There is a grace, a charm in the very ideas she utters. Ah, my friends, I know happiness as well as I know sorrow; I know its signs. By the kiss my Modeste gives me I can guess what is passing within her. I know whether she has received what she was looking for, or whether she is uneasy or expectant. There are many gradations in a kiss, even in that of an innocent young girl, and Modeste is innocence itself; but hers is the innocence of knowledge, not of ignorance. I may be blind, but my tenderness is all-seeing, and I charge you to watch over my daughter."

Dumay, now actually ferocious, the notary, in the character of a man bound to ferret out a mystery, Madame Latournelle, the deceived chaperone, and Madame Dumay, alarmed for her husband's safety, became at once a set of spies, and Modeste from this day forth was never left alone for an instant. Dumay passed nights under her window wrapped in his cloak like a jealous Spaniard; but with all his military sagacity he was unable to detect the least suspicious sign. Unless she loved the nightingales in the villa park, or some fairy prince, Modeste could have seen no one, and had neither given nor received a signal. Madame Dumay, who never went to bed till she knew Modeste was asleep, watched the road from the upper windows of the Chalet with a vigilance equal to her husband's. Under these eight Argus eyes the blameless child, whose every motion was studied and analyzed, came out of the ordeal so fully acquitted of all criminal conversation that the four friends declared to each other privately that Madame Mignon was foolishly over-anxious. Madame Latournelle, who always took Modeste to church and brought her back again, was commissioned to tell the mother that she was mistaken about her daughter.

“Modeste,” she said, “is a young girl of very exalted ideas; she works herself into enthusiasm for the poetry of one writer or the prose of another. You have only to judge by the impression made upon her by that scaffold symphony, ‘The Last Hours of a Convict’” (the saying was Butscha’s, who supplied wit to his benefactress with a lavish hand); “she seemed to me all but crazy with admiration for that Monsieur Hugo. I’m sure I don’t know where such people” (Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Byron being *such people* to the Madame Latournelles of the bourgeoisie) “get their ideas. Modeste kept talking to me of Childe Harold, and as I did not wish to get the worst of the argument I was silly enough to try to read the thing. Perhaps it was the fault of the translator, but it actually turned my stomach; I was dazed; I couldn’t possibly finish it. Why, the man talks about comparisons that howl, rocks that faint, and waves of war! However, he is only a travelling Englishman, and we must expect absurdities,—though his are really inexcusable. He takes you to Spain, and sets you in the clouds above the Alps, and makes the torrents talk, and the stars; and he says there are too many virgins! Did you ever hear the like? Then, after Napoleon’s campaigns, the lines are full of sonorous brass and flaming cannon-balls, rolling along from page to page. Modeste tells me that all that bathos is put in by the translator, and that I ought to read the book in English. But I certainly sha’n’t learn English to read Lord Byron when I didn’t learn it to teach Exupere. I much prefer the novels of Ducray-Dumenil to all these English romances. I’m too good a Norman to fall in love with foreign things,—above all when they come from England.”

Madame Mignon, notwithstanding her melancholy, could not help smiling at the idea of Madame Latournelle reading Childe Harold. The stern scion of a parliamentary house accepted the smile as an approval of her doctrine.

“And, therefore, my dear Madame Mignon,” she went on, “you have taken Modeste’s fancies, which are nothing but the results of her reading, for a love-affair. Remember, she is just twenty. Girls fall in love with themselves at that age; they dress to see themselves well-dressed. I remember I used to make my little sister, now dead, put on a man’s hat and pretend we were monsieur and madame. You see, you had a very happy youth in Frankfort; but let us be just,—Modeste is living here without the slightest amusement. Although, to be sure, her every wish is attended to, still she knows she is shut up and watched, and the life she leads would give her no pleasure at all if it were not for the amusement she gets out of her books. Come, don’t worry yourself; she loves nobody but you. You ought to be very glad that she goes into these enthusiasms for the corsairs of Byron and the heroes of Walter Scott and your own Germans, Egmont, Goethe, Werther, Schiller, and all the other ‘ers.’”

“Well, madame, what do you say to that?” asked Dumay, respectfully, alarmed at Madame Mignon’s silence.

“Modeste is not only inclined to love, but she loves some man,” answered the mother, obstinately.

“Madame, my life is at stake, and you must allow me—not for my sake, but for my wife, my colonel, for all of us—to probe this matter to the bottom, and find out whether it is the mother or the watch-dog who is deceived.”

“It is you who are deceived, Dumay. Ah! if I could but see my daughter!” cried the poor woman.

“But whom is it possible for her to love?” asked the notary. “I’ll answer for my Exupere.”

“It can’t be Gobenheim,” said Dumay, “for since the colonel’s departure he has not spent nine hours a week in this house. Besides, he doesn’t even notice Modeste—that five-franc piece of a man! His uncle Gobenheim-Keller is all the time writing him, ‘Get rich enough to marry a Keller.’ With that idea in his mind you may be sure he doesn’t know which sex Modeste belongs to. No other men ever come here,—for of course I don’t count Butscha, poor little fellow; I love him! He is your Dumay, madame,” said the cashier to Madame Latournelle. “Butscha knows very well that a mere glance at Modeste would cost him a Breton ducking. Not a soul has any communication with this house. Madame Latournelle who takes Modeste to church ever since your—your misfortune, madame, has carefully watched her on the way and all through the service, and has seen nothing suspicious. In short, if I must confess the truth, I have myself raked all the paths about the house every evening for the last month, and found no trace of footsteps in the morning.”

“Rakes are neither costly nor difficult to handle,” remarked the daughter of Germany.

“But the dogs?” cried Dumay.

“Lovers have philters even for dogs,” answered Madame Mignon.

“If you are right, my honor is lost! I may as well blow my brains out,” exclaimed Dumay.

“Why so, Dumay?” said the blind woman.

“Ah, madame, I could never meet my colonel’s eye if he did not find his daughter—now his only daughter—as pure and virtuous as she was when he said to me on the vessel, ‘Let no fear of the scaffold hinder you, Dumay, if the honor of my Modeste is at stake.’”

“Ah! I recognize you both,” said Madame Mignon in a voice of strong emotion.

“I’ll wager my salvation that Modeste is as pure as she was in her cradle,” exclaimed Madame Dumay.

“Well, I shall make certain of it,” replied her husband, “if Madame la Comtesse will allow me to employ certain means; for old troopers understand strategy.”

“I will allow you to do anything that shall enlighten us, provided it does no injury to my last child.”

“What are you going to do, Jean?” asked Madame Dumay; “how can you discover a young girl’s secret if she means to hide it?”

“Obey me, all!” cried the lieutenant, “I shall need every one of you.”

If this rapid sketch were clearly developed it would give a whole picture of manners and customs in which many a family could recognize the events of their own history; but it must suffice as it is to explain the importance of the few details heretofore given about persons and things on the memorable evening when the old soldier had made ready his plot against the young girl, intending to wrench from the recesses of her heart the secret of a love and a lover seen only by a blind mother.

CHAPTER V. THE PROBLEM STILL UNSOLVED

An hour went by in solemn stillness broken only by the cabalistic phrases of the whist-players: “Spades!” “Trumped!” “Cut!” “How are honors?” “Two to four.” “Whose deal?”—phrases which represent in these days the higher emotions of the European aristocracy. Modeste continued to work, without seeming to be surprised at her mother’s silence. Madame Mignon’s handkerchief slipped from her lap to the floor; Butscha precipitated himself upon it, picked it up, and as he returned it whispered in Modeste’s ear, “Take care!” Modeste raised a pair of wondering eyes, whose puzzled glance filled the poor cripple with joy unspeakable. “She is not in love!” he whispered to himself, rubbing his hands till the skin was nearly peeled off. At this moment Exupere tore through the garden and the house, plunged into the salon like an avalanche, and said to Dumay in an audible whisper, “The young man is here!” Dumay sprang for his pistols and rushed out.

“Good God! suppose he kills him!” cried Madame Dumay, bursting into tears.

“What is the matter?” asked Modeste, looking innocently at her friends and not betraying the slightest fear.

“It is all about a young man who is hanging round the house,” cried Madame Latournelle.

“Well!” said Modeste, “why should Dumay kill him?”

“Sancta simplicita!” ejaculated Butscha, looking at his master as proudly as Alexander is made to contemplate Babylon in Lebrun’s great picture.

“Where are you going, Modeste?” asked the mother as her daughter rose to leave the room.

“To get ready for your bedtime, mamma,” answered Modeste, in a voice as pure as the tones of an instrument.

“You haven’t paid your expenses,” said the dwarf to Dumay when he returned.

“Modeste is as pure as the Virgin on our altar,” cried Madame Latournelle.

“Good God! such excitements wear me out,” said Dumay; “and yet I’m a strong man.”

“May I lose that twenty-five sous if I have the slightest idea what you are about,” remarked Gobenheim. “You seem to me to be crazy.”

“And yet it is all about a treasure,” said Butscha, standing on tiptoe to whisper in Gobenheim’s ear.

“Dumay, I am sorry to say that I am still almost certain of what I told you,” persisted Madame Mignon.

“The burden of proof is now on you, madame,” said Dumay, calmly; “it is for you to prove that we are mistaken.”

Discovering that the matter in question was only Modeste’s honor, Gobenheim took his hat, made his bow, and walked off, carrying his ten sous with him,—there being evidently no hope of another rubber.

“Exupere, and you too, Butscha, may leave us,” said Madame Latournelle. “Go back to Havre; you will get there in time for the last piece at the theatre. I’ll pay for your tickets.”

When the four friends were alone with Madame Mignon, Madame Latournelle, after looking at Dumay, who being a Breton understood the mother’s obstinacy, and at her husband who was fingering the cards, felt herself authorized to speak up.

“Madame Mignon, come now, tell us what decisive thing has struck your mind.”

“Ah, my good friend, if you were a musician you would have heard, as I have, the language of love that Modeste speaks.”

The piano of the demoiselles Mignon was among the few articles of furniture which had been moved from the town-house to the Chalet. Modeste often conjured away her troubles by practising, without a master. Born a musician, she played to enliven her mother. She sang by nature, and loved the German airs which her mother taught her. From these lessons and these attempts at self-instruction came a phenomenon not uncommon to natures with a musical vocation; Modeste composed, as far as a person ignorant of the laws of harmony can be said to compose, tender little lyric melodies. Melody is to music what imagery and sentiment are to poetry, a flower that blossoms spontaneously. Consequently, nations have had melodies before harmony,—botany comes later than the flower. In like manner, Modeste, who knew nothing of the painter’s art except what she had seen her sister do in the way of water-color, would have stood subdued and fascinated before the pictures of Raphael, Titian, Rubens, Murillo, Rembrandt, Albert Durer, Holbein,—in other words, before the great ideals of many lands. Lately, for at least a month, Modeste had warbled the songs of nightingales, musical rhapsodies whose poetry and meaning had roused the attention of her mother, already surprised by her sudden eagerness for

composition and her fancy for putting airs into certain verses.

“If your suspicions have no other foundation,” said Latournelle to Madame Mignon, “I pity your susceptibilities.”

“When a Breton girl sings,” said Dumay gloomily, “the lover is not far off.”

“I will let you hear Modeste when she is improvising,” said the mother, “and you shall judge for yourselves—”

“Poor girl!” said Madame Dumay, “If she only knew our anxiety she would be deeply distressed; she would tell us the truth,—especially if she thought it would save Dumay.”

“My friends, I will question my daughter to-morrow,” said Madame Mignon; “perhaps I shall obtain more by tenderness than you have discovered by trickery.”

Was the comedy of the “Fille mal Gardee” being played here,—as it is everywhere and forever,—under the noses of these faithful spies, these honest Bartholos, these Pyrenean hounds, without their being able to ferret out, detect, nor even surmise the lover, the love-affair, or the smoke of the fire? At any rate it was certainly not the result of a struggle between the jailers and the prisoner, between the despotism of a dungeon and the liberty of a victim,—it was simply the never-ending repetition of the first scene played by man when the curtain of the Creation rose; it was Eve in Paradise.

And now, which of the two, the mother or the watch-dog, had the right of it?

None of the persons who were about Modeste could understand that maiden heart—for the soul and the face we have described were in harmony. The girl had transported her existence into another world, as much denied and disbelieved in in these days of ours as the new world of Christopher Columbus in the sixteenth century. Happily, she kept her own counsel, or they would have thought her crazy. But first we must explain the influence of the past upon her nature.

Two events had formed the soul and developed the mind of this young girl. Monsieur and Madame Mignon, warned by the fate that overtook Bettina, had resolved, just before the failure, to marry Modeste. They chose the son of a rich banker, formerly of Hamburg, but established in Havre since 1815,—a man, moreover, who was under obligations to them. The young man, whose name was Francois Althor, the dandy of Havre, blessed with a certain vulgar beauty in which the middle classes delight, well-made, well-fleshed, and with a fine complexion, abandoned his betrothed so hastily on the day of her father’s failure that neither Modeste nor her mother nor either of the Dumays had seen him

since. Latournelle ventured a question on the subject to Jacob Althor, the father; but he only shrugged his shoulders and replied, “I really don’t know what you mean.”

This answer, told to Modeste to give her some experience of life, was a lesson which she learned all the more readily because Latournelle and Dumay made many and long comments on the cowardly desertion. The daughters of Charles Mignon, like spoiled children, had all their wishes gratified; they rode on horseback, kept their own horses and grooms, and otherwise enjoyed a perilous liberty. Seeing herself in possession of an official lover, Modeste had allowed Francisque to kiss her hand, and take her by the waist to mount her. She accepted his flowers and all the little proofs of tenderness with which it is proper to surround the lady of our choice; she even worked him a purse, believing in such ties,—strong indeed to noble souls, but cobwebs for the Gobenheims, the Vilquins, and the Althors.

Some time during the spring which followed the removal of Madame Mignon and her daughter to the Chalet, Francisque Althor came to dine with the Vilquins. Happening to see Modeste over the wall at the foot of the lawn, he turned away his head. Six weeks later he married the eldest Mademoiselle Vilquin. In this way Modeste, young, beautiful, and of high birth, learned the lesson that for three whole months of her engagement she had been nothing more than Mademoiselle Million. Her poverty, well known to all, became a sentinel defending the approaches to the Chalet fully as well as the prudence of the Latournelles or the vigilance of Dumay. The talk of the town ran for a time on Mademoiselle Mignon’s position only to insult her.

“Poor girl! what will become of her?—an old maid, of course.”

“What a fate! to have had the world at her feet; to have had the chance to marry Francisque Althor,—and now, nobody willing to take her!”

“After a life of luxury, to come down to such poverty—”

And these insults were not uttered in secret or left to Modeste’s imagination; she heard them spoken more than once by the young men and the young women of Havre as they walked to Ingouville, and, knowing that Madame Mignon and her daughter lived at the Chalet, talked of them as they passed the house. Friends of the Vilquins expressed surprise that the mother and daughter were willing to live on among the scenes of their former splendor. From her open window behind the closed blinds Modeste sometimes heard such insolence as this:—

“I am sure I can’t think how they can live there,” some one would say as he paced the villa lawn,—perhaps to assist Vilquin in getting rid of his tenant.

“What do you suppose they live on? they haven’t any means of earning money.”

“I am told the old woman has gone blind.”

“Is Mademoiselle Mignon still pretty? Dear me, how dashing she used to be! Well, she hasn’t any horses now.”

Most young girls on hearing these spiteful and silly speeches, born of an envy that now rushed, peevish and drivelling, to avenge the past, would have felt the blood mount to their foreheads; others would have wept; some would have undergone spasms of anger; but Modeste smiled, as we smile at the theatre while watching the actors. Her pride could not descend so low as the level of such speeches.

The other event was more serious than these mercenary meannesses. Bettina Caroline died in the arms of her younger sister, who had nursed her with the devotion of girlhood, and the curiosity of an untainted imagination. In the silence of long nights the sisters exchanged many a confidence. With what dramatic interest was poor Bettina invested in the eyes of the innocent Modeste? Bettina knew love through sorrow only, and she was dying of it. Among young girls every man, scoundrel though he be, is still a lover. Passion is the one thing absolutely real in the things of life, and it insists on its supremacy. Charles d’Estourny, gambler, criminal, and debauchee, remained in the memory of the sisters, the elegant Parisian of the fetes of Havre, the admired of the womenkind. Bettina believed she had carried him off from the coquettish Madame Vilquin, and to Modeste he was her sister’s happy lover. Such adoration in young girls is stronger than all social condemnations. To Bettina’s thinking, justice had been deceived; if not, how could it have sentenced a man who had loved her for six months?—loved her to distraction in the hidden retreat to which he had taken her,—that he might, we may add, be at liberty to go his own way. Thus the dying girl inoculated her sister with love. Together they talked of the great drama which imagination enhances; and Bettina carried with her to the grave her sister’s ignorance, leaving her, if not informed, at least thirsting for information.

Nevertheless, remorse had set its fangs too sharply in Bettina’s heart not to force her to warn her sister. In the midst of her own confessions she had preached duty and implicit obedience to Modeste. On the evening of her death she implored her to remember the tears that soaked her pillow, and not to imitate a conduct which even suffering could not expiate. Bettina accused herself of bringing a curse upon the family, and died in despair at being unable to obtain her father’s pardon. Notwithstanding the consolations which the ministers of religion, touched by her repentance, freely gave her, she cried in heartrending

tones with her latest breath: “Oh father! father!” “Never give your heart without your hand,” she said to Modeste an hour before she died; “and above all, accept no attentions from any man without telling everything to papa and mamma.”

These words, so earnest in their practical meaning, uttered in the hour of death, had more effect upon Modeste than if Bettina had exacted a solemn oath. The dying girl, farseeing as prophet, drew from beneath her pillow a ring which she had sent by her faithful maid, Francoise Cochet, to be engraved in Havre with these words, “Think of Bettina, 1827,” and placed it on her sister’s finger, begging her to keep it there until she married. Thus there had been between these two young girls a strange commingling of bitter remorse and the artless visions of a fleeting spring-time too early blighted by the keen north wind of desertion; yet all their tears, regrets and memories were always subordinate to their horror of evil.

Nevertheless, this drama of a poor seduced sister returning to die under a roof of elegant poverty, the failure of her father, the baseness of her betrothed, the blindness of her mother caused by grief, had touched the surface only of Modeste’s life, by which alone the Dumays and the Latournelles judged her; for no devotion of friends can take the place of a mother’s eye. The monotonous life in the dainty little Chalet, surrounded by the choice flowers which Dumay cultivated; the family customs, as regular as clock-work, the provincial decorum, the games at whist while the mother knitted and the daughter sewed, the silence, broken only by the roar of the sea in the equinoctial storms,—all this monastic tranquillity did in fact hide an inner and tumultuous life, the life of ideas, the life of the spiritual being. We sometimes wonder how it is possible for young girls to do wrong; but such as do so have no blind mother to send her plummet line of intuition to the depths of the subterranean fancies of a virgin heart. The Dumays slept when Modeste opened her window, as it were to watch for the passing of a man,—the man of her dreams, the expected knight who was to mount her behind him and ride away under the fire of Dumay’s pistols.

During the depression caused by her sister’s death Modeste flung herself into the practice of reading, until her mind became sodden in it. Born to the use of two languages, she could speak and read German quite as well as French; she had also, together with her sister, learned English from Madame Dumay. Being very little overlooked in the matter of reading by the people about her, who had no literary knowledge, Modeste fed her soul on the modern masterpieces of three literatures, English, French, and German. Lord Byron, Goethe, Schiller, Walter Scott, Hugo, Lamartine, Crabbe, Moore, the great works of the 17th and 18th centuries, history, drama, and fiction, from Astraea to Manon Lescaut, from

Montaigne’s Essays to Diderot, from the Fabliaux to the Nouvelle Heloise,—in short, the thought of three lands crowded with confused images that girlish head, august in its cold guilelessness, its native chastity, but from which there sprang full-armed, brilliant, sincere, and strong, an overwhelming admiration for genius. To Modeste a new book was an event; a masterpiece that would have horrified Madame Latournelle made her happy,—equally unhappy if the great work did not play havoc with her heart. A lyric instinct bubbled in that girlish soul, so full of the beautiful illusions of its youth. But of this radiant existence not a gleam reached the surface of daily life; it escaped the ken of Dumay and his wife and the Latournelles; the ears of the blind mother alone caught the crackling of its flame.

The profound disdain which Modeste now conceived for ordinary men gave to her face a look of pride, an inexpressible untamed shyness, which tempered her Teutonic simplicity, and accorded well with a peculiarity of her head. The hair growing in a point above the forehead seemed the continuation of a slight line which thought had already furrowed between the eyebrows, and made the expression of untameability perhaps a shade too strong. The voice of this charming child, whom her father, delighting in her wit, was wont to call his “little proverb of Solomon,” had acquired a precious flexibility of organ through the practice of three languages. This advantage was still further enhanced by a natural bell-like tone both sweet and fresh, which touched the heart as delightfully as it did the ear. If the mother could no longer see the signs of a noble destiny upon her daughter’s brow, she could study the transitions of her soul’s development in the accents of that voice attuned to love.

CHAPTER VI. A MAIDEN’S FIRST ROMANCE

To this period of Modeste’s eager rage for reading succeeded the exercise of a strange faculty given to vigorous imaginations,—the power, namely, of making herself an actor in a dream-existence; of representing to her own mind the things desired, with so vivid a conception that they seemed actually to attain reality; in short, to enjoy by thought,—to live out her years within her mind; to marry; to grow old; to attend her own funeral like Charles V.; to play within herself the comedy of life and, if need be, that of death. Modeste was indeed playing, but all alone, the comedy of Love. She fancied herself adored to the summit of her wishes in many an imagined phase of social life. Sometimes as the heroine of a dark romance, she loved the executioner, or the wretch who ended her days upon the scaffold, or, like her sister, some Parisian youth without a penny, whose struggles were all beneath a garret-roof. Sometimes she was Ninon, scorning men amid continual fetes; or some applauded actress, or gay adventuress, exhausting in her own behalf the luck of Gil Blas, or the triumphs of Pasta, Malibran, and Florine. Then, weary of the horrors and excitements, she returned to actual life. She married a notary, she ate the plain brown bread of honest everyday life, she saw herself a Madame Latournelle; she accepted a painful existence, she bore all the trials of a struggle with fortune. After that she went back to the romances: she was loved for her beauty; a son of a peer of France, an eccentric, artistic young man, divined her heart, recognized the star which the genius of a De Stael had planted on her brow. Her father returned, possessing millions. With his permission, she put her various lovers to certain tests (always carefully guarding her own independence); she owned a magnificent estate and castle, servants, horses, carriages, the choicest of everything that luxury could bestow, and kept her suitors uncertain until she was forty years old, at which age she made her choice.

This edition of the Arabian Nights in a single copy lasted nearly a year, and taught Modeste the sense of satiety through thought. She held her life too often in her hand, she said to herself philosophically and with too real a bitterness, too seriously, and too often, “Well, what is it, after all?” not to have plunged to her waist in the deep disgust which all men of genius feel when they try to complete by intense toil the work to which they have devoted themselves. Her youth and her rich nature alone kept Modeste at this period of her life from seeking to enter a cloister. But this sense of satiety cast her, saturated as she still was with

Catholic spirituality, into the love of Good, the infinite of heaven. She conceived of charity, service to others, as the true occupation of life; but she cowered in the gloomy dreariness of finding in it no food for the fancy that lay crouching in her heart like an insect at the bottom of a calyx. Meanwhile she sat tranquilly sewing garments for the children of the poor, and listening abstractedly to the grumblings of Monsieur Latournelle when Dumay held the thirteenth card or drew out his last trump.

Her religious faith drove Modeste for a time into a singular track of thought. She imagined that if she became sinless (speaking ecclesiastically) she would attain to such a condition of sanctity that God would hear her and accomplish her desires. “Faith,” she thought, “can move mountains; Christ has said so. The Saviour led his apostle upon the waters of the lake Tiberias; and I, all I ask of God is a husband to love me; that is easier than walking upon the sea.” She fasted through the next Lent, and did not commit a single sin; then she said to herself that on a certain day coming out of church she should meet a handsome young man who was worthy of her, whom her mother would accept, and who would fall madly in love with her. When the day came on which she had, as it were, summoned God to send her an angel, she was persistently followed by a rather disgusting beggar; moreover, it rained heavily, and not a single young man was in the streets. On another occasion she went to walk on the jetty to see the English travellers land; but each Englishman had an Englishwoman, nearly as handsome as Modeste herself, who saw no one at all resembling a wandering Childe Harold. Tears overcame her, as she sat down like Marius on the ruins of her imagination. But on the day when she subpoenaed God for the third time she firmly believed that the Elect of her dreams was within the church, hiding, perhaps out of delicacy, behind one of the pillars, round all of which she dragged Madame Latournelle on a tour of inspection. After this failure, she deposed the Deity from omnipotence. Many were her conversations with the imaginary lover, for whom she invented questions and answers, bestowing upon him a great deal of wit and intelligence.

The high ambitions of her heart hidden within these romances were the real explanation of the prudent conduct which the good people who watched over Modeste so much admired; they might have brought her any number of young Althors or Vilquins, and she would never have stooped to such clowns. She wanted, purely and simply, a man of genius,—talent she cared little for; just as a lawyer is of no account to a girl who aims for an ambassador. Her only desire for wealth was to cast it at the feet of her idol. Indeed, the golden background of these visions was far less rich than the treasury of her own heart, filled with

womanly delicacy; for its dominant desire was to make some Tasso, some Milton, a Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Murat, a Christopher Columbus happy.

Commonplace miseries did not seriously touch this youthful soul, who longed to extinguish the fires of the martyrs ignored and rejected in their own day. Sometimes she imagined balms of Gilead, soothing melodies which might have allayed the savage misanthropy of Rousseau. Or she fancied herself the wife of Lord Byron; guessing intuitively his contempt for the real, she made herself as fantastic as the poetry of Manfred, and provided for his scepticism by making him a Catholic. Modeste attributed Moliere's melancholy to the women of the seventeenth century. "Why is there not some one woman," she asked herself, "loving, beautiful, and rich, ready to stand beside each man of genius and be his slave, like Lara, the mysterious page?" She had, as the reader perceives, fully understood "il pianto," which the English poet chanted by the mouth of his Gulmare. Modeste greatly admired the behavior of the young Englishwoman who offered herself to Crebillon, the son, who married her. The story of Sterne and Eliza Draper was her life and her happiness for several months. She made herself ideally the heroine of a like romance, and many a time she rehearsed in imagination the sublime role of Eliza. The sensibility so charmingly expressed in that delightful correspondence filled her eyes with tears which, it is said, were lacking in those of the wittiest of English writers.

Modeste existed for some time on a comprehension, not only of the works, but of the characters of her favorite authors,—Goldsmith, the author of Obermann, Charles Nodier, Maturin. The poorest and the most suffering among them were her deities; she guessed their trials, initiated herself into a destitution where the thoughts of genius brooded, and poured upon it the treasures of her heart; she fancied herself the giver of material comfort to these great men, martyrs to their own faculty. This noble compassion, this intuition of the struggles of toilers, this worship of genius, are among the choicest perceptions that flutter through the souls of women. They are, in the first place, a secret between the woman and God, for they are hidden; in them there is nothing striking, nothing that gratifies the vanity,—that powerful auxiliary to all action among the French.

Out of this third period of the development of her ideas, there came to Modeste a passionate desire to penetrate to the heart of one of these abnormal beings; to understand the working of the thoughts and the hidden griefs of genius,—to know not only what it wanted but what it was. At the period when this story begins, these vagaries of fancy, these excursions of her soul into the void, these feelers put forth into the darkness of the future, the impatience of an ungiven love to find its goal, the nobility of all her thoughts of life, the decision

of her mind to suffer in a sphere of higher things rather than flounder in the marshes of provincial life like her mother, the pledge she had made to herself never to fail in conduct, but to respect her father's hearth and bring it happiness,—all this world of feeling and sentiment had lately come to a climax and taken shape. Modeste wished to be the friend and companion of a poet, an artist, a man in some way superior to the crowd of men. But she intended to choose him,—not to give him her heart, her life, her infinite tenderness freed from the trammels of passion, until she had carefully and deeply studied him.

She began this pretty romance by simply enjoying it. Profound tranquillity settled down upon her soul. Her cheeks took on a soft color; and she became the beautiful and noble image of Germany, such as we have lately seen her, the glory of the Chalet, the pride of Madame Latournelle and the Dumays. Modeste was living a double existence. She performed with humble, loving care all the minute duties of the homely life at the Chalet, using them as a rein to guide the poetry of her ideal life, like the Carthusian monks who labor methodically on material things to leave their souls the freer to develop in prayer. All great minds have bound themselves to some form of mechanical toil to obtain greater mastery of thought. Spinosa ground glasses for spectacles; Bayle counted the tiles on the roof; Montesquieu gardened. The body being thus subdued, the soul could spread its wings in all security.

Madame Mignon, reading her daughter's soul, was therefore right. Modeste loved; she loved with that rare platonic love, so little understood, the first illusion of a young girl, the most delicate of all sentiments, a very dainty of the heart. She drank deep draughts from the chalice of the unknown, the vague, the visionary. She admired the blue plumage of the bird that sings afar in the paradise of young girls, which no hand can touch, no gun can cover, as it flits across the sight; she loved those magic colors, like sparkling jewels dazzling to the eye, which youth can see, and never sees again when Reality, the hideous hag, appears with witnesses accompanied by the mayor. To live the very poetry of love and not to see the lover—ah, what sweet intoxication! what visionary rapture! a chimera with flowing man and outspread wings!

The following is the puerile and even silly event which decided the future life of this young girl.

Modeste happened to see in a bookseller's window a lithographic portrait of one of her favorites, Canalis. We all know what lies such pictures tell,—being as they are the result of a shameless speculation, which seizes upon the personality of celebrated individuals as if their faces were public property.

In this instance Canalis, sketched in a Byronic pose, was offering to public

admiration his dark locks floating in the breeze, a bare throat, and the unfathomable brow which every bard ought to possess. Victor Hugo's forehead will make more persons shave their heads than the number of incipient marshals ever killed by the glory of Napoleon. This portrait of Canalis (poetic through mercantile necessity) caught Modeste's eye. The day on which it caught her eye one of Arthez's best books happened to be published. We are compelled to admit, though it may be to Modeste's injury, that she hesitated long between the illustrious poet and the illustrious prose-writer. Which of these celebrated men was free?—that was the question.

Modeste began by securing the co-operation of Francoise Cochet, a maid taken from Havre and brought back again by poor Bettina, whom Madame Mignon and Madame Dumay now employed by the day, and who lived in Havre. Modeste took her to her own room and assured her that she would never cause her parents any grief, never pass the bounds of a young girl's propriety, and that as to Francoise herself she would be well provided for after the return of Monsieur Mignon, on condition that she would do a certain service and keep it an inviolable secret. What was it? Why, a nothing—perfectly innocent. All that Modeste wanted of her accomplice was to put certain letters into the post at Havre and to bring some back which would be directed to herself, Francoise Cochet. The treaty concluded, Modeste wrote a polite note to Dauriat, publisher of the poems of Canalis, asking, in the interest of that great poet, for some particulars about him, among others if he were married. She requested the publisher to address his answer to Mademoiselle Francoise, "poste restante," Havre.

Dauriat, incapable of taking the epistle seriously, wrote a reply in presence of four or five journalists who happened to be in his office at the time, each of whom added his particular stroke of wit to the production.

Mademoiselle,—Canalis (Baron of), Constant Cys Melchior, member of the French Academy, born in 1800, at Canalis (Correze), five feet four inches in height, of good standing, vaccinated, spotless birth, has given a substitute to the conscription, enjoys perfect health, owns a small patrimonial estate in the Correze, and wishes to marry, but the lady must be rich.

He beareth per pale, gules an axe or, sable three escallops argent, surmounted by a baron’s coronet; supporters, two larches, vert. Motto: “Or et fer” (no allusion to Ophir or auriferous).

The original Canalis, who went to the Holy Land with the First Crusade, is cited in the chronicles of Auvergne as being armed with an axe on account of the family indigence, which to this day weighs heavily on the race. This noble baron, famous for discomfiting a vast number of infidels, died, without “or” or “fer,” as naked as a worm, near Jerusalem, on the plains of Ascalon, ambulances not being then invented.

The chateau of Canalis (the domain yields a few chestnuts) consists of two dismantled towers, united by a piece of wall covered by a fine ivy, and is taxed at twenty-two francs.

The undersigned (publisher) calls attention to the fact that he pays ten thousand francs for every volume of poetry written by Monsieur de Canalis, who does not give his shells, or his nuts either, for nothing.

The chanticler of the Correze lives in the rue de Paradis-Poissoniere, number 29, which is a highly suitable location for a poet of the angelic school. Letters must be *post-paid*.

Noble dames of the faubourg Saint-Germain are said to take the path to Paradise and protect its god. The king, Charles X., thinks so highly of this great poet as to believe him capable of governing the country; he has lately made him officer of the Legion of honor, and (what pays him better) president of the court of Claims at the foreign office. These functions do not hinder this great genius from drawing an annuity out of the fund for the encouragement of the arts and belles letters.

The last edition of the works of Canalis, printed on vellum, royal 8vo, from the press of Didot, with illustrations by Bixiou, Joseph Bridau, Schinner, Sommervieux, etc., is in five volumes, price, nine francs post-paid.

This letter fell like a cobble-stone on a tulip. A poet, secretary of claims, getting a stipend in a public office, drawing an annuity, seeking a decoration, adored by the women of the faubourg Saint-Germain—was that the muddy minstrel lingering along the quays, sad, dreamy, worn with toil, and re-entering his garret fraught with poetry? However, Modeste perceived the irony of the envious bookseller, who dared to say, “I invented Canalis; I made Nathan!” Besides, she re-read her hero’s poems,—verses extremely seductive, insincere, and hypocritical, which require a word of analysis, were it only to explain her infatuation.

Canalis may be distinguished from Lamartine, chief of the angelic school, by

a wheedling tone like that of a sick-nurse, a treacherous sweetness, and a delightful correctness of diction. If the chief with his strident cry is an eagle, Canalis, rose and white, is a flamingo. In him women find the friend they seek, their interpreter, a being who understands them, who explains them to themselves, and a safe confidant. The wide margins given by Didot to the last edition were crowded with Modeste's pencilled sentiments, expressing her sympathy with this tender and dreamy spirit. Canalis does not possess the gift of life; he cannot breathe existence into his creations; but he knows how to calm vague sufferings like those which assailed Modeste. He speaks to young girls in their own language; he can allay the anguish of a bleeding wound and lull the moans, even the sobs of woe. His gift lies not in stirring words, nor in the remedy of strong emotions, he contents himself with saying in harmonious tones which compel belief, "I suffer with you; I understand you; come with me; let us weep together beside the brook, beneath the willows." And they follow him! They listen to his empty and sonorous poetry like infants to a nurse's lullaby. Canalis, like Nodier, enchants the reader by an artlessness which is genuine in the prose writer and artificial in the poet, by his tact, his smile, the shedding of his rose-leaves, in short by his infantile philosophy. He imitates so well the language of our early youth that he leads us back to the prairie-land of our illusions. We can be pitiless to the eagles, requiring from them the quality of the diamond, incorruptible perfection; but as for Canalis, we take him for what he is and let the rest go. He seems a good fellow; the affectations of the angelic school have answered his purpose and succeeded, just as a woman succeeds when she plays the ingenue cleverly, and simulates surprise, youth, innocence betrayed, in short, the wounded angel.

Modeste, recovering her first impression, renewed her confidence in that soul, in that countenance as ravishing as the face of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. She paid no further attention to the publisher. And so, about the beginning of the month of August she wrote the following letter to this Dorat of the sacristy, who still ranks as a star of the modern Pleiades.

To Monsieur de Canalis,—Many a time, monsieur, I have wished to write to you; and why? Surely you guess why,—to tell you how much I admire your genius. Yes, I feel the need of expressing to you the admiration of a poor country girl, lonely in her little corner, whose only happiness is to read your thoughts. I have read Rene, and I come to you. Sadness leads to reverie. How many other women are sending you the homage of their secret thoughts? What chance have I for notice among so many? This paper, filled with my soul,—can it be more to you than the perfumed letters which already beset you. I come to you with less grace than others, for I wish to remain unknown and yet to receive your entire confidence —as though you had long known me.

Answer my letter and be friendly with me. I cannot promise to make

myself known to you, though I do not positively say I will not some day do so.

What shall I add? Read between the lines of this letter, monsieur, the great effort which I am making: permit me to offer you my hand,—that of a friend, ah! a true friend.

Your servant, O. d'Este M.
P.S.—If you do me the favor to answer this letter address your reply, if you please, to Mademoiselle F. Cochet, "poste restante," Havre.

CHAPTER VII. A POET OF THE ANGELIC SCHOOL

All young girls, romantic or otherwise, can imagine the impatience in which Modeste lived for the next few days. The air was full of tongues of fire. The trees were like a plumage. She was not conscious of a body; she hovered in space, the earth melted away under her feet. Full of admiration for the post-office, she followed her little sheet of paper on its way; she was happy, as we all are happy at twenty years of age, in the first exercise of our will. She was possessed, as in the middle ages. She made pictures in her mind of the poet's abode, of his study; she saw him unsealing her letter; and then followed myriads of suppositions.

After sketching the poetry we cannot do less than give the profile of the poet. Canalis is a short, spare man, with an air of good-breeding, a dark-complexioned, moon-shaped face, and a rather mean head like that of a man who has more vanity than pride. He loves luxury, rank, and splendor. Money is of more importance to him than to most men. Proud of his birth, even more than of his talent, he destroys the value of his ancestors by making too much of them in the present day,—after all, the Canalis are not Navarreins, nor Cadignans, nor Grandlieus. Nature, however, helps him out in his pretensions. He has those eyes of Eastern effulgence which we demand in a poet, a delicate charm of manner, and a vibrant voice; yet a taint of natural charlatanism destroys the effect of nearly all these advantages; he is a born comedian. If he puts forward his well-shaped foot, it is because the attitude has become a habit; if he uses exclamatory terms they are part of himself; if he poses with high dramatic action he has made that deportment his second nature. Such defects as these are not incompatible with a general benevolence and a certain quality of errant and purely ideal chivalry, which distinguishes the paladin from the knight. Canalis has not devotion enough for a Don Quixote, but he has too much elevation of thought not to put himself on the nobler side of questions and things. His poetry, which takes the town by storm on all profitable occasions, really injures the man as a poet; for he is not without mind, but his talent prevents him from developing it; he is overweighted by his reputation, and is always aiming to make himself appear greater than he has the credit of being. Thus, as often happens, the man is entirely out of keeping with the products of his thought. The author of these

naive, caressing, tender little lyrics, these calm idylls pure and cold as the surface of a lake, these verses so essentially feminine, is an ambitious little creature in a tightly buttoned frock-coat, with the air of a diplomat seeking political influence, smelling of the musk of aristocracy, full of pretension, thirsting for money, already spoiled by success in two directions, and wearing the double wreath of myrtle and of laurel. A government situation worth eight thousand francs, three thousand francs' annuity from the literary fund, two thousand from the Academy, three thousand more from the paternal estate (less the taxes and the cost of keeping it in order),—a total fixed income of fifteen thousand francs, plus the ten thousand bought in, one year with another, by his poetry; in all twenty-five thousand francs,—this for Modeste's hero was so precarious and insufficient an income that he usually spent five or six thousand francs more every year; but the king's privy purse and the secret funds of the foreign office had hitherto supplied the deficit. He wrote a hymn for the king's coronation which earned him a whole silver service,—having refused a sum of money on the ground that a Canalis owed his duty to his sovereign.

But about this time Canalis had, as the journalists say, exhausted his budget. He felt himself unable to invent any new form of poetry; his lyre did not have seven strings, it had one; and having played on that one string so long, the public allowed him no other alternative but to hang himself with it, or to hold his tongue. De Marsay, who did not like Canalis, made a remark whose poisoned shaft touched the poet to the quick of his vanity. "Canalis," he said, "always reminds me of that brave man whom Frederic the Great called up and commended after a battle because his trumpet had never ceased tooting its one little tune." Canalis's ambition was to enter political life, and he made capital of a journey he had taken to Madrid as secretary to the embassy of the Duc de Chaulieu, though it was really made, according to Parisian gossip, in the capacity of "attache to the duchess." How many times a sarcasm or a single speech has decided the whole course of a man's life. Colla, the late president of the Cisalpine republic, and the best lawyer in Piedmont, was told by a friend when he was forty years of age that he knew nothing of botany. He was piqued, became a second Jussieu, cultivated flowers, and compiled and published "The Flora of Piedmont," in Latin, a labor of ten years. "I'll master De Marsay some of these days!" thought the crushed poet; "after all, Canning and Chateaubriand are both in politics."

Canalis would gladly have brought forth some great political poem, but he was afraid of the French press, whose criticisms are savage upon any writer who takes four alexandrines to express one idea. Of all the poets of our day only

three, Hugo, Theophile Gautier, and De Vigny, have been able to win the double glory of poet and prose-writer, like Racine and Voltaire, Moliere, and Rabelais,—a rare distinction in the literature of France, which ought to give a man a right to the crowning title of poet.

So then, the bard of the faubourg Saint-Germain was doing a wise thing in trying to house his little chariot under the protecting roof of the present government. When he became president of the court of Claims at the foreign office, he stood in need of a secretary,—a friend who could take his place in various ways; cook up his interests with publishers, see to his glory in the newspapers, help him if need be in politics,—in short, a cat's paw and satellite. In Paris many men of celebrity in art, science, and literature have one or more train-bearers, captains of the guard, chamberlains as it were, who live in the sunshine of their presence,—aides-de-camp entrusted with delicate missions, allowing themselves to be compromised if necessary; workers round the pedestal of the idol; not exactly his servants, nor yet his equals; bold in his defence, first in the breach, covering all retreats, busy with his business, and devoted to him just so long as their illusions last, or until the moment when they have got all they wanted. Some of these satellites perceive the ingratitude of their great man; others feel that they are simply made tools of; many weary of the life; very few remain contented with that sweet equality of feeling and sentiment which is the only reward that should be looked for in an intimacy with a superior man,—a reward that contented Ali when Mohammed raised him to himself.

Many of these men, misled by vanity, think themselves quite as capable as their patron. Pure devotion, such as Modeste conceived it, without money and without price, and more especially without hope, is rare. Nevertheless there are Mennevals to be found, more perhaps in Paris than elsewhere, men who value a life in the background with its peaceful toil; these are the wandering Benedictines of our social world, which offers them no other monastery. These brave, meek hearts live, by their actions and in their hidden lives, the poetry that poets utter. They are poets themselves in soul, in tenderness, in their lonely vigils and meditations,—as truly poets as others of the name on paper, who fatten in the fields of literature at so much a verse; like Lord Byron, like all who live, alas, by ink, the Hippocrene water of to-day, for want of a better.

Attracted by the fame of Canalis, also by the prospect of political interest, and advised thereto by Madame d'Espard, who acted in the matter for the Duchesse de Chaulieu, a young lawyer of the court of Claims became secretary and confidential friend of the poet, who welcomed and petted him very much as a broker caresses his first dabbler in the funds. The beginning of this

companionship bore a very fair resemblance to friendship. The young man had already held the same relation to a minister, who went out of office in 1827, taking care before he did so to appoint his young secretary to a place in the foreign office. Ernest de La Briere, then about twenty-seven years of age, was decorated with the Legion of honor but was without other means than his salary; he was accustomed to the management of business and had learned a good deal of life during his four years in a minister's cabinet. Kindly, amiable, and over-modest, with a heart full of pure and sound feelings, he was averse to putting himself in the foreground. He loved his country, and wished to serve her, but notoriety abashed him. To him the place of secretary to a Napoleon was far more desirable than that of the minister himself. As soon as he became the friend and secretary of Canalis he did a great amount of labor for him, but by the end of eighteen months he had learned to understand the barrenness of a nature that was poetic through literary expression only. The truth of the old proverb, "The cowl doesn't make the monk," is eminently shown in literature. It is extremely rare to find among literary men a nature and a talent that are in perfect accord. The faculties are not the man himself. This disconnection, whose phenomena are amazing, proceeds from an unexplored, possibly an unexplorable mystery. The brain and its products of all kinds (for in art the hand of man is a continuation of his brain) are a world apart, which flourishes beneath the cranium in absolute independence of sentiments, feelings, and all that is called virtue, the virtue of citizens, fathers, and private life. This, however true, is not absolutely so; nothing is absolutely true of man. It is certain that a debauched man will dissipate his talent, that a drunkard will waste it in libations; while, on the other hand, no man can give himself talent by wholesome living: nevertheless, it is all but proved that Virgil, the painter of love, never loved a Dido, and that Rousseau, the model citizen, had enough pride to had furnished forth an aristocracy. On the other hand Raphael and Michael Angelo do present the glorious conjunction of genius with the lines of character. Talent in men is therefore, in all moral points, very much what beauty is in women,—simply a promise. Let us, therefore, doubly admire the man in whom both heart and character equal the perfection of his genius.

When Ernest discovered within his poet an ambitious egoist, the worst species of egoist (for there are some amiable forms of the vice), he felt a delicacy in leaving him. Honest natures cannot easily break the ties that bind them, especially if they have tied them voluntarily. The secretary was therefore still living in domestic relations with the poet when Modeste's letter arrived,—in such relations, be it said, as involved a perpetual sacrifice of his feelings. La

Briere admitted the frankness with which Canalis had laid himself bare before him. Moreover, the defects of the man, who will always be considered a great poet during his lifetime and flattered as Martmontel was flattered, were only the wrong side of his brilliant qualities. Without his vanity and his magniloquence it is possible that he might never have acquired the sonorous elocution which is so useful and even necessary an instrument in political life. His cold-bloodedness touched at certain points on rectitude and loyalty; his ostentation had a lining of generosity. Results, we must remember, are to the profit of society; motives concern God.

But after the arrival of Modeste's letter Ernest deceived himself no longer as to Canalis. The pair had just finished breakfast and were talking together in the poet's study, which was on the ground-floor of a house standing back in a court-yard, and looked into a garden.

"There!" exclaimed Canalis, "I was telling Madame de Chaulieu the other day that I ought to bring out another poem; I knew admiration was running short, for I have had no anonymous letters for a long time."

"Is it from an unknown woman?"

"Unknown? yes!—a D'Este, in Havre; evidently a feigned name."

Canalis passed the letter to La Briere. The little poem, with all its hidden enthusiasms, in short, poor Modeste's heart, was disdainfully handed over, with the gesture of a spoiled dandy.

"It is a fine thing," said the lawyer, "to have the power to attract such feelings; to force a poor woman to step out of the habits which nature, education, and the world dictate to her, to break through conventions. What privileges genius wins! A letter such as this, written by a young girl—a genuine young girl—without hidden meanings, with real enthusiasm—"

"Well, what?" said Canalis.

"Why, a man might suffer as much as Tasso and yet feel recompensed," cried La Briere.

"So he might, my dear fellow, by a first letter of that kind, and even a second; but how about the thirtieth? And suppose you find out that these young enthusiasts are little jades? Or imagine a poet rushing along the brilliant path in search of her, and finding at the end of it an old Englishwoman sitting on a mile-stone and offering you her hand! Or suppose this post-office angel should really be a rather ugly girl in quest of a husband? Ah, my boy! the effervescence then goes down."

“I begin to perceive,” said La Briere, smiling, “that there is something poisonous in glory, as there is in certain dazzling flowers.”

“And then,” resumed Canalis, “all these women, even when they are simple-minded, have ideals, and you can’t satisfy them. They never say to themselves that a poet is a vain man, as I am accused of being; they can’t conceive what it is for an author to be at the mercy of a feverish excitement, which makes him disagreeable and capricious; they want him always grand, noble; it never occurs to them that genius is a disease, or that Nathan lives with Florine; that D’Arthez is too fat, and Joseph Bridau is too thin; that Beranger limps, and that their own particular deity may have the snuffles! A Lucien de Rubempre, poet and cupid, is a phoenix. And why should I go in search of compliments only to pull the string of a shower-bath of horrid looks from some disillusioned female?”

“Then the true poet,” said La Briere, “ought to remain hidden, like God, in the centre of his worlds, and be only seen in his own creations.”

“Glory would cost too dear in that case,” answered Canalis. “There is some good in life. As for that letter,” he added, taking a cup of tea, “I assure you that when a noble and beautiful woman loves a poet she does not hide in the corner boxes, like a duchess in love with an actor; she feels that her beauty, her fortune, her name are protection enough, and she dares to say openly, like an epic poem: ‘I am the nymph Calypso, enamored of Telemachus.’ Mystery and feigned names are the resources of little minds. For my part I no longer answer masks —”

“I should love a woman who came to seek me,” cried La Briere. “To all you say I reply, my dear Canalis, that it cannot be an ordinary girl who aspires to a distinguished man; such a girl has too little trust, too much vanity; she is too faint-hearted. Only a star, a—”

“—princess!” cried Canalis, bursting into a shout of laughter; “only a princess can descend to him. My dear fellow, that doesn’t happen once in a hundred years. Such a love is like that flower that blossoms every century. Princesses, let me tell you, if they are young, rich, and beautiful, have something else to think of; they are surrounded like rare plants by a hedge of fools, well-bred idiots as hollow as elder-bushes! My dream, alas! the crystal of my dream, garlanded from hence to the Correze with roses—ah! I cannot speak of it—it is in fragments at my feet, and has long been so. No, no, all anonymous letters are begging letters; and what sort of begging? Write yourself to that young woman, if you suppose her young and pretty, and you’ll find out. There is nothing like experience. As for me, I can’t reasonably be expected to love every woman; Apollo, at any rate he of Belvedere, is a delicate consumptive who must take

care of his health.”

“But when a woman writes to you in this way her excuse must certainly be in her consciousness that she is able to eclipse in tenderness and beauty every other woman,” said Ernest, “and I should think you might feel some curiosity—”

“Ah,” said Canalis, “permit me, my juvenile friend, to abide by the beautiful duchess who is all my joy.”

“You are right, you are right!” cried Ernest. However, the young secretary read and re-read Modeste’s letter, striving to guess the mind of its hidden writer.

“There is not the least fine-writing here,” he said, “she does not even talk of your genius; she speaks to your heart. In your place I should feel tempted by this fragrance of modesty,—this proposed agreement—”

“Then, sign it!” cried Canalis, laughing; “answer the letter and go to the end of the adventure yourself. You shall tell me the results three months hence—if the affair lasts so long.”

Four days later Modeste received the following letter, written on extremely fine paper, protected by two envelopes, and sealed with the arms of Canalis.

Mademoiselle,—The admiration for fine works (allowing that my books are such) implies something so lofty and sincere as to protect you from all light jesting, and to justify before the sternest judge the step you have taken in writing to me.

But first I must thank you for the pleasure which such proofs of sympathy afford, even though we may not merit them,—for the maker of verses and the true poet are equally certain of the intrinsic worth of their writings,—so readily does self-esteem lend itself to praise. The best proof of friendship that I can give to an unknown lady in exchange for a faith which allays the sting of criticism, is to share with her the harvest of my own experience, even at the risk of dispelling her most vivid illusions.

Mademoiselle, the noblest adornment of a young girl is the flower of a pure and saintly and irreproachable life. Are you alone in the world? If you are, there is no need to say more. But if you have a family, a father or a mother, think of all the sorrow that might come to them from such a letter as yours addressed to a poet of whom you know nothing personally. All writers are not angels; they have many defects. Some are frivolous, heedless, foppish, ambitious, dissipated; and, believe me, no matter how imposing innocence may be, how chivalrous a poet is, you will meet with many a degenerate troubadour in Paris ready to cultivate your affection only to betray it. By such a man your letter would be interpreted otherwise than it is by me. He would see a thought that is not in it, which you, in your innocence, have not suspected. There are as many natures as there are writers. I am deeply flattered that you have judged me capable of understanding you; but had you, perchance, fallen upon a hypocrite, a scoffer, one whose books may be melancholy but whose life is a perpetual carnival, you would have found as the result of your generous imprudence an evil-minded man, the frequenter of green-rooms, perhaps a hero of some gay resort. In the bower of clematis where you dream of poets, can you smell the odor of the cigar which

drives all poetry from the manuscript?

But let us look still further. How could the dreamy, solitary life you lead, doubtless by the sea-shore, interest a poet, whose mission it is to imagine all, and to paint all? What reality can equal imagination? The young girls of the poets are so ideal that no living daughter of Eve can compete with them. And now tell me, what will you gain,—you, a young girl, brought up to be the virtuous mother of a family,—if you learn to comprehend the terrible agitations of a poet's life in this dreadful capital, which may be defined by one sentence,—the hell in which men love.

If the desire to brighten the monotonous existence of a young girl thirsting for knowledge has led you to take your pen in hand and write to me, has not the step itself the appearance of degradation? What meaning am I to give to your letter? Are you one of a rejected caste, and do you seek a friend far away from you? Or, are you afflicted with personal ugliness, yet feeling within you a noble soul which can give and receive a confidence? Alas, alas, the conclusion to be drawn is grievous. You have said too much, or too little; you have gone too far, or not far enough. Either let us drop this correspondence, or, if you continue it, tell me more than in the letter you have now written me.

But, mademoiselle, if you are young, if you are beautiful, if you have a home, a family, if in your heart you have the precious ointment, the spikenard, to pour out, as did Magdalene on the feet of Jesus, let yourself be won by a man worthy of you; become what every pure young girl should be,—a good woman, the virtuous mother of a family. A poet is the saddest conquest that a girl can make; he is full of vanity, full of angles that will sharply wound a woman's proper pride, and kill a tenderness which has no experience of life. The wife of a poet should love him long before she marries him; she must train herself to the charity of angels, to their forbearance, to all the virtues of motherhood. Such qualities, mademoiselle, are but germs in a young girl.

Hear the whole truth,—do I not owe it to you in return for your intoxicating flattery? If it is a glorious thing to marry a great renown, remember also that you must soon discover a superior man to be, in all that makes a man, like other men. He therefore poorly realizes the hopes that attach to him as a phoenix. He becomes like a woman whose beauty is over-praised, and of whom we say: "I thought her far more lovely." She has not warranted the portrait painted by the fairy to whom I owe your letter,—the fairy whose name is Imagination.

Believe me, the qualities of the mind live and thrive only in a sphere invisible, not in daily life; the wife of a poet bears the burden; she sees the jewels manufactured, but she never wears them. If the glory of the position fascinates you, hear me now when I tell you that its pleasures are soon at an end. You will suffer when you find so many asperities in a nature which, from a distance, you thought equable, and such coldness at the shining summit. Moreover, as women never set their feet within the world of real difficulties, they cease to appreciate what they once admired as soon as they think they see the inner mechanism of it.

I close with a last thought, in which there is no disguised entreaty; it is the counsel of a friend. The exchange of souls can take place only between persons who are resolved to hide nothing from each other. Would you show yourself for such as you are to an unknown man? I dare not follow out the consequences of that idea.

Deign to accept, mademoiselle, the homage which we owe to all women, even those who are disguised and masked.

So this was the letter she had worn between her flesh and her corset above her palpitating heart throughout one whole day! For this she had postponed the reading until the midnight hour when the household slept, waiting for the solemn silence with the eager anxiety of an imagination on fire! For this she had blessed the poet by anticipation, reading a thousand letters ere she opened one,—fancying all things, except this drop of cold water falling upon the vaporous forms of her illusion, and dissolving them as prussic acid dissolves life. What could she do but hide herself in her bed, blow out her candle, bury her face in the sheets and weep?

All this happened during the first days of July. But Modeste presently got up, walked across the room and opened the window. She wanted air. The fragrance of the flowers came to her with the peculiar freshness of the odors of the night. The sea, lighted by the moon, sparkled like a mirror. A nightingale was singing in a tree. “Ah, there is the poet!” thought Modeste, whose anger subsided at once. Bitter reflections chased each other through her mind. She was cut to the quick; she wished to re-read the letter, and lit a candle; she studied the sentences so carefully studied when written; and ended by hearing the wheezing voice of the outer world.

“He is right, and I am wrong,” she said to herself. “But who could ever believe that under the starry mantle of a poet I should find nothing but one of Moliere’s old men?”

When a woman or young girl is taken in the act, “flagrante delicto,” she conceives a deadly hatred to the witness, the author, or the object of her fault. And so the true, the single-minded, the untamed and untamable Modeste conceived within her soul an unquenchable desire to get the better of that righteous spirit, to drive him into some fatal inconsistency, and so return him blow for blow. This girl, this child, as we may call her, so pure, whose head alone had been misguided,—partly by her reading, partly by her sister’s sorrows, and more perhaps by the dangerous meditations of her solitary life,—was suddenly caught by a ray of sunshine flickering across her face. She had been standing for three hours on the shores of the vast sea of Doubt. Nights like these are never forgotten. Modeste walked straight to her little Chinese table, a gift from her father, and wrote a letter dictated by the infernal spirit of vengeance which palpitates in the hearts of young girls.

CHAPTER VIII. BLADE TO BLADE

To Monsieur de Canalis:

Monsieur,—You are certainly a great poet, and you are something more,—an honest man. After showing such loyal frankness to a young girl who was stepping to the verge of an abyss, have you enough left to answer without hypocrisy or evasion the following question?

Would you have written the letter I now hold in answer to mine,—would your ideas, your language have been the same,—had some one whispered in your ear (what may prove true), Mademoiselle O. d'Este M. has six millions and does intend to have a dunce for a master?

Admit the supposition for a moment. Be with me what you are with yourself; fear nothing. I am wiser than my twenty years; nothing that is frank can hurt you in my mind. When I have read your confidence, if you deign to make it, you shall receive from me an answer to your first letter.

Having admired your talent, often so sublime, permit me to do homage to your delicacy and your integrity, which force me to remain always,

Your humble servant, O. d'Este M.

When Ernest de La Briere had held this letter in his hands for some little time he went to walk along the boulevards, tossed in mind like a tiny vessel by a tempest when the wind is blowing from all points of the compass. Most young men, specially true Parisians, would have settled the matter in a single phrase, "The girl is a little hussy." But for a youth whose soul was noble and true, this attempt to put him, as it were, upon his oath, this appeal to truth, had the power to awaken the three judges hidden in the conscience of every man. Honor, Truth, and Justice, getting on their feet, cried out in their several ways energetically.

"Ah, my dear Ernest," said Truth, "you never would have read that lesson to a rich heiress. No, my boy; you would have gone in hot haste to Havre to find out if the girl were handsome, and you would have been very unhappy indeed at her preference for genius; and if you could have tripped up your friend and supplanted him in her affections, Mademoiselle d'Este would have been a divinity."

"What?" cried Justice, "are you not always bemoaning yourselves, you penniless men of wit and capacity, that rich girls marry beings whom you wouldn't take as your servants? You rail against the materialism of the century which hastens to join wealth to wealth, and never marries some fine young man

with brains and no money to a rich girl. What an outcry you make about it; and yet here is a young woman who revolts against that very spirit of the age, and behold! the poet replies with a blow at her heart!”

“Rich or poor, young or old, ugly or handsome, the girl is right; she has sense and judgment, she has tripped you over into the slough of self-interest and lets you know it,” cried Honor. “She deserves an answer, a sincere and loyal and frank answer, and, above all, the honest expression of your thought. Examine yourself! sound your heart and purge it of its meannesses. What would Moliere’s Alceste say?”

And La Briere, having started from the boulevard Poissoniere, walked so slowly, absorbed in these reflections, that he was more than an hour in reaching the boulevard des Capucines. Then he followed the quays, which led him to the Cour des Comptes, situated in that time close to the Saint-Chapelle. Instead of beginning on the accounts as he should have done, he remained at the mercy of his perplexities.

“One thing is evident,” he said to himself; “she hasn’t six millions; but that’s not the point—”

Six days later, Modeste received the following letter:

Mademoiselle,—You are not a D’Este. The name is a feigned one to conceal your own. Do I owe the revelations which you solicit to a person who is untruthful about herself? Question for question: Are you of an illustrious family? or a noble family? or a middle-class family? Undoubtedly ethics and morality cannot change; they are one: but obligations vary in the different states of life. Just as the sun lights up a scene diversely and produces differences which we admire, so morality conforms social duty to rank, to position. The peccadillo of a soldier is a crime in a general, and vice-versa. Observances are not alike in all cases. They are not the same for the gleaner in the field, for the girl who sews at fifteen sous a day, for the daughter of a petty shopkeeper, for the young bourgoise, for the child of a rich merchant, for the heiress of a noble family, for a daughter of the house of Este. A king must not stoop to pick up a piece of gold, but a laborer ought to retrace his steps to find ten sous; though both are equally bound to obey the laws of economy. A daughter of Este, who is worth six millions, has the right to wear a broad-brimmed hat and plume, to flourish her whip, press the flanks of her barb, and ride like an amazon decked in gold lace, with a lackey behind her, into the presence of a poet and say: “I love poetry; and I would fain expiate Leonora’s cruelty to Tasso!” but a daughter of the people would cover herself with ridicule by imitating her. To what class do you belong? Answer sincerely, and I will answer the question you have put to me.

As I have not the honor of knowing you personally, and yet am bound to you, in a measure, by the ties of poetic communion, I am unwilling to offer any commonplace compliments. Perhaps you have already won a malicious victory by thus embarrassing a maker of books.

The young man was certainly not wanting in the sort of shrewdness which is permissible to a man of honor. By return courier he received an answer:—

To Monsieur de Canalis,—You grow more and more sensible, my dear poet. My father is a count. The chief glory of our house was a cardinal, in the days when cardinals walked the earth by the side of kings. I am the last of our family, which ends in me; but I have the necessary quarterings to make my entry into any court or chapter-house in Europe. We are quite the equals of the Canalis. You will be so kind as to excuse me from sending you our arms.

Endeavor to answer me as truthfully as I have now answered you. I await your response to know if I can then sign myself as I do now,

Your servant, O. d’Este M.

“The little mischief! how she abuses her privileges,” cried La Briere; “but isn’t she frank!”

No young man can be four years private secretary to a cabinet minister, and live in Paris and observe the carrying on of many intrigues, with perfect impunity; in fact, the purest soul is more or less intoxicated by the heady atmosphere of the imperial city. Happy in the thought that he was not Canalis, our young secretary engaged a place in the mail-coach for Havre, after writing a letter in which he announced that the promised answer would be sent a few days later,—excusing the delay on the ground of the importance of the confession and the pressure of his duties at the ministry.

He took care to get from the director-general of the post-office a note to the postmaster at Havre, requesting secrecy and attention to his wishes. Ernest was thus enabled to see Francoise Cochet when she came for the letters, and to follow her without exciting observation. Guided by her, he reached Ingouville and saw Modeste Mignon at the window of the Chalet.

“Well, Francoise?” he heard the young girl say, to which the maid responded,—

“Yes, mademoiselle, I have one.”

Struck by the girl’s great beauty, Ernest retraced his steps and asked a man on the street the name of the owner of that magnificent estate.

“That?” said the man, nodding to the villa.

“Yes, my friend.”

“Oh, that belongs to Monsieur Vilquin, the richest shipping merchant in Havre, so rich he doesn’t know what he is worth.”

“There is no Cardinal Vilquin that I know of in history,” thought Ernest, as he walked back to Havre for the night mail to Paris. Naturally he questioned the postmaster about the Vilquin family, and learned that it possessed an enormous

fortune. Monsieur Vilquin had a son and two daughters, one of whom was married to Monsieur Althor, junior. Prudence kept La Briere from seeming anxious about the Vilquins; the postmaster was already looking at him slyly.

“Is there there any one staying with them at the present moment,” he asked, “besides the family?”

“The d’Herouville family is there just now. They do talk of a marriage between the young duke and the remaining Mademoiselle Vilquin.”

“Ha!” thought Ernest; “there was a celebrated Cardinal d’Herouville under the Valois, and a terrible marshal whom they made a duke in the time of Henri IV.”

Ernest returned to Paris having seen enough of Modeste to dream of her, and to think that, whether she were rich or whether she were poor, if she had a noble soul he would like to make her Madame de La Briere; and so thinking, he resolved to continue the correspondence.

Ah! you poor women of France, try to remain hidden if you can; try to weave the least little romance about your lives in the midst of a civilization which posts in the public streets the hours when the coaches arrive and depart; which counts all letters and stamps them twice over, first with the hour when they are thrown into the boxes, and next with that of their delivery; which numbers the houses, prints the tax of every tenant on a metal register at the doors (after verifying its particulars), and will soon possess one vast register of every inch of its territory down to the smallest parcel of land, and the most insignificant features of it,—a giant work ordained by a giant. Try, imprudent young ladies, to escape not only the eye of the police, but the incessant chatter which takes place in a country town about the veriest trifles,—how many dishes the prefect has at his dessert, how many slices of melon are left at the door of some small householder,—which strains its ear to catch the chink of the gold a thrifty man lays by, and spends its evenings in calculating the incomes of the village and the town and the department. It was mere chance that enabled Modeste to escape discovery through Ernest’s reconnoitring expedition,—a step which he already regretted; but what Parisian can allow himself to be the dupe of a little country girl? Incapable of being duped! that horrid maxim is the dissolvent of all noble sentiments in man.

We can readily guess the struggle of feeling to which this honest young fellow fell a prey when we read the letter that he now indited, in which every stroke of the flail which scourged his conscience will be found to have left its trace.

This is what Modeste read a few days later, as she sat by her window on a fine summer’s day:—

Mademoiselle,—Without hypocrisy or evasion, *yes*, if I had been certain that you possessed an immense fortune I should have acted differently. Why? I have searched for the reason; here it is. We have within us an inborn feeling, inordinately developed by social life, which drives us to the pursuit and to the possession of happiness. Most men confound happiness with the means that lead to it; money in their eyes is the chief element of happiness. I should, therefore, have endeavored to win you, prompted by that social sentiment which has in all ages made wealth a religion. At least, I think I should. It is not to be expected of a man still young that he can have the wisdom to substitute sound sense for the pleasure of the senses; within sight of a prey the brutal instincts hidden in the heart of man drive him on. Instead of that lesson, I should have sent you compliments and flatteries. Should I have kept my own esteem in so doing? I doubt it. Mademoiselle, in such a case success brings absolution; but happiness? That is another thing. Should I have distrusted my wife had I won her in that way? Most assuredly I should. Your advance on me would sooner or later have come between us. Your husband, however grand your fancy may make him, would have ended by reproaching you for having abased him. You, yourself, might have come, sooner or later, to despise him. The strong man forgives, but the poet whines. Such, mademoiselle, is the answer which my honesty compels me to make to you.

And now, listen to me. You have the triumph of forcing me to reflect deeply,—first on you, whom I do not sufficiently know; next, on myself, of whom I knew too little. You have had the power to stir up many of the evil thoughts which crouched in my heart, as in all hearts; but from them something good and generous has come forth, and I salute you with my most fervent benedictions, just as at sea we salute the lighthouse which shows the rocks on which we were about to perish. Here is my confession, for I would not lose your esteem nor my own for all the treasures of earth.

I wished to know who you are. I have just returned from Havre, where I saw Francoise Cochet, and followed her to Ingouville. You are as beautiful as the woman of a poet’s dream; but I do not know if you are Mademoiselle Vilquin concealed under Mademoiselle d’Herouville, or Mademoiselle d’Herouville hidden under Mademoiselle Vilquin. Though all is fair in war, I blushed at such spying and stopped short in my inquiries. You have roused my curiosity; forgive me for being somewhat of a woman; it is, I believe, the privilege of a poet.

Now that I have laid bare my heart and allowed you to read it, you will believe in the sincerity of what I am about to add. Though the glimpse I had of you was all too rapid, it has sufficed to modify my opinion of your conduct. You are a poet and a poem, even more than you are a woman. Yes, there is in you something more precious than beauty; you are the beautiful Ideal of art, of fancy. The step you took, blamable as it would be in an ordinary young girl, allotted to an every-day destiny, has another aspect if endowed with the nature which I now attribute to you. Among the crowd of beings flung by fate into the social life of this planet to make up a generation there are exceptional souls. If your letter is the outcome of long poetic reveries on the fate which conventions bring to women, if, constrained by the impulse of a lofty and intelligent mind, you have wished to understand the life of a man to whom you attribute the gift of genius, to the end that you may create a friendship withdrawn from the ordinary relations of life, with a soul in communion with your own, disregarding thus the ordinary trammels of your sex,—then, assuredly, you are an exception. The law which rightly limits the actions of the crowd

is too limited for you. But in that case, the remark in my first letter returns in greater force,—you have done too much or not enough.

Accept once more my thanks for the service you have rendered me, that of compelling me to sound my heart. You have corrected in me the false idea, only too common in France, that marriage should be a means of fortune. While I struggled with my conscience a sacred voice spoke to me. I swore solemnly to make my fortune myself, and not be led by motives of cupidity in choosing the companion of my life. I have also reproached myself for the blamable curiosity you have excited in me. You have not six millions. There is no concealment possible in Havre for a young lady who possesses such a fortune; you would be discovered at once by the pack of hounds of great families whom I see in Paris on the hunt after heiresses, and who have already sent one, the grand equerry, the young duke, among the Vilquins. Therefore, believe me, the sentiments I have now expressed are fixed in my mind as a rule of life, from which I have abstracted all influences of romance or of actual fact. Prove to me, therefore, that you have one of those souls which may be forgiven for its disobedience to the common law, by perceiving and comprehending the spirit of this letter as you did that of my first letter. If you are destined to a middle-class life, obey the iron law which holds society together. Lifted in mind above other women, I admire you; but if you seek to obey an impulse which you ought to repress, I pity you. The all-wise moral of that great domestic epic “Clarissa Harlowe” is that legitimate and honorable love led the poor victim to her ruin because it was conceived, developed, and pursued beyond the boundaries of family restraint. The family, however cruel and even foolish it may be, is in the right against the Lovelaces. The family is Society. Believe me, the glory of a young girl, of a woman, must always be that of repressing her most ardent impulses within the narrow sphere of conventions. If I had a daughter able to become a Madame de Stael I should wish her dead at fifteen. Can you imagine a daughter of yours flaunting on the stage of fame, exhibiting herself to win the plaudits of a crowd, and not suffer anguish at the thought? No matter to what heights a woman can rise by the inward poetry of her soul, she must sacrifice the outer signs of superiority on the altar of her home. Her impulse, her genius, her aspirations toward Good, the whole poem of a young girl’s being, should belong to the man she accepts and the children whom she brings into the world. I think I perceive in you a secret desire to widen the narrow circle of the life to which all women are condemned, and to put love and passion into marriage. Ah! it is a lovely dream! it is not impossible; it is difficult, but if realized, may it not be to the despair of souls—forgive me the hackneyed word—“incompris”?

If you seek a platonic friendship it will be to your sorrow in after years. If your letter was a jest, discontinue it. Perhaps this little romance is to end here—is it? It has not been without fruit. My sense of duty is aroused, and you, on your side, will have learned something of Society. Turn your thoughts to real life; throw the enthusiasms you have culled from literature into the virtues of your sex.

Adieu, mademoiselle. Do me the honor to grant me your esteem. Having seen you, or one whom I believe to be you, I have known that your letter was simply natural; a flower so lovely turns to the sun—of poetry. Yes, love poetry as you love flowers, music, the grandeur of the sea, the beauties of nature; love them as an adornment of the soul, but remember what I have had the honor of telling you as to the nature of poets. Be cautious not to marry, as you say, a dunce, but seek the partner whom God has made for

you. There are souls, believe me, who are fit to appreciate you, and to make you happy. If I were rich, if you were poor, I would lay my heart and my fortunes at your feet; for I believe your soul to be full of riches and of loyalty; to you I could confide my life and my honor in absolute security.

Once more, adieu, adieu, fairest daughter of Eve the fair.

The reading of this letter, swallowed like a drop of water in the desert, lifted the mountain which weighed heavily on Modeste's heart: then she saw the mistake she had made in arranging her plan, and repaired it by giving Francoise some envelopes directed to herself, in which the maid could put the letters which came from Paris and drop them again into the box. Modeste resolved to receive the postman herself on the steps of the Chalet at the hour when he made his delivery.

As to the feelings that this reply, in which the noble heart of poor La Briere beat beneath the brilliant phantom of Canalis, excited in Modeste, they were as multifarious and confused as the waves which rushed to die along the shore while with her eyes fixed on the wide ocean she gave herself up to the joy of having (if we dare say so) harpooned an angelic soul in the Parisian Gulf, of having divined that hearts of price might still be found in harmony with genius, and, above all, for having followed the magic voice of intuition.

A vast interest was now about to animate her life. The wires of her cage were broken: the bolts and bars of the pretty Chalet—where were they? Her thoughts took wings.

"Oh, father!" she cried, looking out to the horizon. "Come back and make us rich and happy."

The answer which Ernest de La Briere received some five days later will tell the reader more than any elaborate disquisition of ours.

CHAPTER IX. THE POWER OF THE UNSEEN

To Monsieur de Canalis:

My friend,—Suffer me to give you that name,—you have delighted me; I would not have you other than you are in this letter, the first—oh, may it not be the last! Who but a poet could have excused and understood a young girl so delicately?

I wish to speak with the sincerity that dictated the first lines of your letter. And first, let me say that most fortunately you do not know me. I can joyfully assure you than I am neither that hideous Mademoiselle Vilquin nor the very noble and withered Mademoiselle d'Herouville who floats between twenty and forty years of age, unable to decide on a satisfactory date. The Cardinal d'Herouville flourished in the history of the Church at least a century before the cardinal of whom we boast as our only family glory,—for I take no account of lieutenant-generals, and abbes who write trumpery little verses.

Moreover, I do not live in the magnificent villa Vilquin; there is not in my veins, thank God, the ten-millionth of a drop of that chilly blood which flows behind a counter. I come on one side from Germany, on the other from the south of France; my mind has a Teutonic love of reverie, my blood the vivacity of Provence. I am noble on my father's and on my mother's side. On my mother's I derive from every page of the Almanach de Gotha. In short, my precautions are well taken. It is not in any man's power, nor even in the power of the law, to unmask my incognito. I shall remain veiled, unknown.

As to my person and as to my "belongings," as the Normans say, make yourself easy. I am at least as handsome as the little girl (ignorantly happy) on whom your eyes chanced to light during your visit to Havre; and I do not call myself poverty-stricken, although ten sons of peers may not accompany me on my walks. I have seen the humiliating comedy of the heiress sought for her millions played on my account. In short, make no attempt, even on a wager, to reach me. Alas! though free as air, I am watched and guarded,—by myself, in the first place, and secondly, by people of nerve and courage who would not hesitate to put a knife in your heart if you tried to penetrate my retreat. I do not say this to excite your courage or stimulate your curiosity; I believe I have no need of such incentives to interest you and attach you to me.

I will now reply to the second edition, considerably enlarged, of your first sermon.

Will you have a confession? I said to myself when I saw you so distrustful, and mistaking me for Corinne (whose improvisations bore me dreadfully), that in all probability dozes of Muses had already led you, rashly curious, into their valleys, and begged you to taste the fruits of their boarding-school Parnassus. Oh! you are perfectly safe with me, my friend; I may love poetry, but I have no little verses in my pocket-book, and my stockings are, and will remain, immaculately white. You shall not be pestered with the "Flowers of my Heart" in one or more volumes. And, finally, should it ever happen that I say to you the word "Come!"

you will not find—you know it now—an old maid, no, nor a poor and ugly one.

Ah! my friend, if you only knew how I regret that you came to Havre! You have lowered the charm of what you call my romance. God alone knew the treasure I was reserving for the man noble enough, and trusting enough, and perspicacious enough to come—having faith in my letters, having penetrated step by step into the depths of my heart—to come to our first meeting with the simplicity of a child: for that was what I dreamed to be the innocence of a man of genius. And now you have spoiled my treasure! But I forgive you; you live in Paris and, as you say, there is always a man within a poet.

Because I tell you this will you think me some little girl who cultivates a garden-full of illusions? You, who are witty and wise, have you not guessed that when Mademoiselle d'Este received your pedantic lesson she said to herself: "No, dear poet, my first letter was not the pebble which a vagabond child flings about the highway to frighten the owner of the adjacent fruit-trees, but a net carefully and prudently thrown by a fisherman seated on a rock above the sea, hoping and expecting a miraculous draught."

All that you say so beautifully about the family has my approval. The man who is able to please me, and of whom I believe myself worthy, will have my heart and my life,—with the consent of my parents, for I will neither grieve them, nor take them unawares: happily, I am certain of reigning over them; and, besides, they are wholly without prejudice. Indeed, in every way, I feel myself protected against any delusions in my dream. I have built the fortress with my own hands, and I have let it be fortified by the boundless devotion of those who watch over me as if I were a treasure,—not that I am unable to defend myself in the open, if need be; for, let me say, circumstances have furnished me with armor of proof on which is engraved the word "Disdain." I have the deepest horror of all that is calculating,—of all that is not pure, disinterested, and wholly noble. I worship the beautiful, the ideal, without being romantic; though I HAVE been, in my heart of hearts, in my dreams. But I recognize the truth of the various things, just even to vulgarity, which you have written me about Society and social life.

For the time being we are, and we can only be, two friends. Why seek an unseen friend? you ask. Your person may be unknown to me, but your mind, your heart I *know*; they please me, and I feel an infinitude of thoughts within my soul which need a man of genius for their confidant. I do not wish the poem of my heart to be wasted; I would have it known to you as it is to God. What a precious thing is a true comrade, one to whom we can tell all! You will surely not reject the unpublished leaflets of a young girl's thoughts when they fly to you like the pretty insects fluttering to the sun? I am sure you have never before met with this good fortune of the soul,—the honest confidences of an honest girl. Listen to her prattle; accept the music that she sings to you in her own heart. Later, if our souls are sisters, if our characters warrant the attempt, a white-haired old serving-man shall await you by the wayside and lead you to the cottage, the villa, the castle, the palace—I don't know yet what sort of bower it will be, nor what its color, nor whether this conclusion will ever be possible; but you will admit, will you not? that it is poetic, and that Mademoiselle d'Este has a complying disposition. Has she not left you free? Has she gone with jealous feet to watch you in the salons of Paris? Has she imposed upon you the labors of some high emprise, such as paladins sought voluntarily in the olden time?

No, she asks a perfectly spiritual and mystic alliance. Come to me when you are unhappy, wounded, weary. Tell me all, hide nothing; I have balms for all your ills. I am twenty years of age, dear friend, but I have the sense of fifty, and unfortunately I have known through the experience of another all the horrors and the delights of love. I know what baseness the human heart can contain, what infamy; yet I myself am an honest girl. No, I have no illusions; but I have something better, something real,—I have beliefs and a religion. See! I open the ball of our confidences.

Whoever I marry—provided I choose him for myself—may sleep in peace or go to the East Indies sure that he will find me on his return working at the tapestry which I began before he left me; and in every stitch he shall read a verse of the poem of which he has been the hero. Yes, I have resolved within my heart never to follow my husband where he does not wish me to go. I will be the divinity of his hearth. That is my religion of humanity. But why should I not test and choose the man to whom I am to be like the life to the body? Is a man ever impeded by life? What can that woman be who thwarts the man she loves?—an illness, a disease, not life. By life, I mean that joyous health which makes each hour a pleasure.

But to return to your letter, which will always be precious to me. Yes, jesting apart, it contains that which I desired, an expression of prosaic sentiments which are as necessary to family life as air to the lungs; and without which no happiness is possible. To act as an honest man, to think as a poet, to love as women love, that is what I longed for in my friend, and it is now no longer a chimera.

Adieu, my friend. I am poor at this moment. That is one of the reasons why I cling to my concealment, my mask, my impregnable fortress. I have read your last verses in the “Revue,”—ah! with what delight, now that I am initiated in the austere loftiness of your secret soul.

Will it make you unhappy to know that a young girl prays for you; that you are her solitary thought,—without a rival except in her father and mother? Can there be any reason why you should reject these pages full of you, written for you, seen by no eye but yours? Send me their counterpart. I am so little of a woman yet that your confidences—provided they are full and true—will suffice for the happiness of your

O. d’Este M.

“Good heavens! can I be in love already?” cried the young secretary, when he perceived that he had held the above letter in his hands more than an hour after reading it. “What shall I do? She thinks she is writing to the great poet! Can I continue the deception? Is she a woman of forty, or a girl of twenty?”

Ernest was now fascinated by the great gulf of the unseen. The unseen is the obscurity of infinitude, and nothing is more alluring. In that sombre vastness fires flash, and furrow and color the abyss with fancies like those of Martin. For a busy man like Canalis, an adventure of this kind is swept away like a harebell by a mountain torrent, but in the more unoccupied life of the young secretary, this charming girl, whom his imagination persistently connected with the blonde

beauty at the window, fastened upon his heart, and did as much mischief in his regulated life as a fox in a poultry-yard. La Briere allowed himself to be preoccupied by this mysterious correspondent; and he answered her last letter with another, a pretentious and carefully studied epistle, in which, however, passion begins to reveal itself through pique.

Mademoiselle,—Is it quite loyal in you to enthrone yourself in the heart of a poor poet with a latent intention of abandoning him if he is not exactly what you wish, leaving him to endless regrets,—showing him for a moment an image of perfection, were it only assumed, and at any rate giving him a foretaste of happiness? I was very short-sighted in soliciting this letter, in which you have begun to unfold the elegant fabric of your thoughts. A man can easily become enamored with a mysterious unknown who combines such fearlessness with such originality, so much imagination with so much feeling. Who would not wish to know you after reading your first confidence? It requires a strong effort on my part to retain my senses in thinking of you, for you combine all that can trouble the head or the heart of man. I therefore make the most of the little self-possession you have left me to offer you my humble remonstrances.

Do you really believe, mademoiselle, that letters, more or less true in relation to the life of the writers, more or less insincere,—for those which we write to each other are the expressions of the moment at which we pen them, and not of the general tenor of our lives,—do you believe, I say, that beautiful as they may be, they can at all replace the representation that we could make of ourselves to each other by the revelations of daily intercourse? Man is dual. There is a life invisible, that of the heart, to which letters may suffice; and there is a life material, to which more importance is, alas, attached than you are aware of at your age. These two existences must, however, be made to harmonize in the ideal which you cherish; and this, I may remark in passing, is very rare.

The pure, spontaneous, disinterested homage of a solitary soul which is both educated and chaste, is one of those celestial flowers whose color and fragrance console for every grief, for every wound, for every betrayal which makes up the life of a literary man; and I thank you with an impulse equal to your own. But after this poetical exchange of my griefs for the pearls of your charity, what next? what do you expect? I have neither the genius nor the splendid position of Lord Byron; above all, I have not the halo of his fictitious damnation and his false social woes. But what could you have hoped from him in like circumstances? His friendship? Well, he who ought to have felt only pride was eaten up by vanity of every kind,—sickly, irritable vanity which discouraged friendship. I, a thousand-fold more insignificant than he, may I not have discordances of character, and make friendship a burden heavy indeed to bear? In exchange for your reveries, what will you gain? The dissatisfaction of a life which will not be wholly yours. The compact is madness. Let me tell you why. In the first place, your projected poem is a plagiarism. A young German girl, who was not, like you, semi-German, but altogether so, adored Goethe with the rash intoxication of girlhood. She made him her friend, her religion, her god, knowing at the same time that he was married. Madame Goethe, a worthy German woman, lent herself to this worship with a sly good-nature which did not cure Bettina. But what was the end of it all? The young ecstatic married a man who was

younger and handsomer than Goethe. Now, between ourselves, let us admit that a young girl who should make herself the handmaid of a man of genius, his equal through comprehension, and should piously worship him till death, like one of those divine figures sketched by the masters on the shutters of their mystic shrines, and who, when Germany lost him, should have retired to some solitude away from men, like the friend of Lord Bolingbroke,—let us admit, I say, that the young girl would have lived forever, inlaid in the glory of the poet as Mary Magdalene in the cross and triumph of our Lord. If that is sublime, what say you to the reverse of the picture? As I am neither Goethe nor Lord Byron, the colossi of poetry and egotism, but simply the author of a few esteemed verses, I cannot expect the honors of a cult. Neither am I disposed to be a martyr. I have ambition, and I have a heart; I am still young and I have my career to make. See me for what I am. The bounty of the king and the protection of his ministers give me sufficient means of living. I have the outward bearing of a very ordinary man. I go to the soirees in Paris like any other empty-headed fop; and if I drive, the wheels of my carriage do not roll on the solid ground, absolutely indispensable in these days, of property invested in the funds. But if I am not rich, neither do I have the reliefs and consolations of life in a garret, the toil uncomprehended, the fame in penury, which belong to men who are worth far more than I,—D'Arthez, for instance.

Ah! what prosaic conclusions will your young enthusiasm find to these enchanting visions. Let us stop here. If I have had the happiness of seeming to you a terrestrial paragon, you have been to me a thing of light and a beacon, like those stars that shine for a moment and disappear. May nothing ever tarnish this episode of our lives. Were we to continue it I might love you; I might conceive one of those mad passions which rend all obstacles, which light fires in the heart whose violence is greater than their duration. And suppose I succeeded in pleasing you? we should end our tale in the common vulgar way,—marriage, a household, children, Belise and Henriette Chrysale together!—could it be? Therefore, adieu.

CHAPTER X. THE MARRIAGE OF SOULS

To Monsieur de Canalis:

My Friend,—Your letter gives me as much pain as pleasure. But perhaps some day we shall find nothing but pleasure in writing to each other. Understand me thoroughly. The soul speaks to God and asks him for many things; he is mute. I seek to obtain in you the answers that God does not make to me. Cannot the friendship of Mademoiselle de Gournay and Montaigne be revived in us? Do you not remember the household of Sismonde de Sismondi in Geneva? The most lovely home ever known, as I have been told; something like that of the Marquis de Pescaire and his wife,—happy to old age. Ah! friend, is it impossible that two hearts, two harps, should exist as in a symphony, answering each other from a distance, vibrating with delicious melody in unison? Man alone of all creation is in himself the harp, the musician, and the listener. Do you think to find me uneasy and jealous like ordinary women? I know that you go into the world and meet the handsomest and the wittiest women in Paris. May I not suppose that some one of those mermaids has deigned to clasp you in her cold and scaly arms, and that she has inspired the answer whose prosaic opinions sadden me? There is something in life more beautiful than the garlands of Parisian coquetry; there grows a flower far up those Alpine peaks called men of genius, the glory of humanity, which they fertilize with the dews their lofty heads draw from the skies. I seek to cultivate that flower and make it bloom; for its wild yet gentle fragrance can never fail,—it is eternal.

Do me the honor to believe that there is nothing low or commonplace in me. Were I Bettina, for I know to whom you allude, I should never have become Madame von Arnim; and had I been one of Lord Byron’s many loves, I should be at this moment in a cloister. You have touched me to the quick. You do not know me, but you shall know me. I feel within me something that is sublime, of which I dare speak without vanity. God has put into my soul the roots of that Alpine flower born on the summits of which I speak, and I cannot plant it in an earthen pot upon my window-sill and see it die. No, that glorious flower-cup, single in its beauty, intoxicating in its fragrance, shall not be dragged through the vulgarities of life! it is yours—yours, before any eye has blighted it, yours forever! Yes, my poet, to you belong my thoughts,—all, those that are secret, those that are gayest; my heart is yours without reserve and with its infinite affection. If you should personally not please me, I shall never marry. I can live in the life of the heart, I can exist on your mind, your sentiments; they please me, and I will always be what I am, your friend. Yours is a noble moral nature; I have recognized it, I have appreciated it, and that suffices me. In that is all my future. Do not laugh at a young and pretty handmaiden who shrinks not from the thought of being some day the old companion of a poet,—a sort of mother perhaps, or a housekeeper; the guide of his judgment and a source of his wealth. This handmaiden—so devoted, so precious to the lives of such as you—is Friendship, pure, disinterested friendship, to whom you will tell all, who listens and sometimes shakes her head; who knits by the light of the lamp and waits to be present when the poet returns home soaked with rain, or vexed in mind. Such shall be my destiny if I do not

find that of a happy wife attached forever to her husband; I smile alike at the thought of either fate. Do you believe France will be any the worse if Mademoiselle d'Este does not give it two or three sons, and never becomes a Madame Vilquin-something-or-other? As for me, I shall never be an old maid. I shall make myself a mother, by taking care of others and by my secret co-operation in the existence of a great man, to whom also I shall carry all my thoughts and all my earthly efforts.

I have the deepest horror of commonplaceness. If I am free, if I am rich (and I know that I am young and pretty), I will never belong to any ninny just because he is the son of a peer of France, nor to a merchant who could ruin himself and me in a day, nor to a handsome creature who would be a sort of woman in the household, nor to a man of any kind who would make me blush twenty times a day for being his. Make yourself easy on that point. My father adores my wishes; he will never oppose them. If I please my poet, and he pleases me, the glorious structure of our love shall be built so high as to be inaccessible to any kind of misfortune. I am an eaglet; and you will see it in my eyes.

I shall not repeat what I have already said, but I will put its substance in the least possible number of words, and confess to you that I should be the happiest of women if I were imprisoned by love as I am now imprisoned by the wish and will of a father. Ah! my friend, may we bring to a real end the romance that has come to us through the first exercise of my will: listen to its argument:—

A young girl with a lively imagination, locked up in a tower, is weary with longing to run loose in the park where her eyes only are allowed to rove. She invents a way to loosen her bars; she jumps from the casement; she scales the park wall; she frolics along the neighbor's sward—it is the Everlasting comedy. Well, that young girl is my soul, the neighbor's park is your genius. Is it not all very natural? Was there ever a neighbor that did not complain that unknown feet broke down his trellises? I leave it to my poet to answer.

But does the lofty reasoner after the fashion of Moliere want still better reasons? Well, here they are. My dear Geronte, marriages are usually made in defiance of common-sense. Parents make inquiries about a young man. If the Leander—who is supplied by some friend, or caught in a ball-room—is not a thief, and has no visible rent in his reputation, if he has the necessary fortune, if he comes from a college or a law-school and so fulfils the popular ideas of education, and if he wears his clothes with a gentlemanly air, he is allowed to meet the young lady, whose mother has ordered her to guard her tongue, to let no sign of her heart or soul appear on her face, which must wear the smile of a danseuse finishing a pirouette. These commands are coupled with instructions as to the danger of revealing her real character, and the additional advice of not seeming alarmingly well educated. If the settlements have all been agreed upon, the parents are good-natured enough to let the pair see each other for a few moments; they are allowed to talk or walk together, but always without the slightest freedom, and knowing that they are bound by rigid rules. The man is as much dressed up in soul as he is in body, and so is the young girl. This pitiable comedy, mixed with bouquets, jewels, and theatre-parties is called "paying your addresses." It revolts me: I desire that actual marriage shall be the result of a previous and long marriage of souls. A young girl, a woman, has throughout her life only this one moment when reflection, second sight, and experience are necessary to her. She plays her liberty,

her happiness, and she is not allowed to throw the dice; she risks her all, and is forced to be a mere spectator. I have the right, the will, the power to make my own unhappiness, and I use them, as did my mother, who, won by beauty and led by instinct, married the most generous, the most liberal, the most loving of men. I know that you are free, a poet, and noble-looking. Be sure that I should not have chosen one of your brothers in Apollo who was already married. If my mother was won by beauty, which is perhaps the spirit of form, why should I not be attracted by the spirit and the form united? Shall I not know you better by studying you in this correspondence than I could through the vulgar experience of “receiving your addresses”? This is the question, as Hamlet says.

But my proceedings, dear Chrysale, have at least the merit of not binding us personally. I know that love has its illusions, and every illusion its to-morrow. That is why there are so many partings among lovers vowed to each other for life. The proof of love lies in two things,—suffering and happiness. When, after passing through these double trials of life two beings have shown each other their defects as well as their good qualities, when they have really observed each other’s character, then they may go to their grave hand in hand. My dear Argante, who told you that our little drama thus begun was to have no future? In any case shall we not have enjoyed the pleasures of our correspondence?

I await your orders, monseigneur, and I am with all my heart,

Your handmaiden,

O. d’Este M.

To Mademoiselle O. d’Este M.,—You are a witch, a spirit, and I love you! Is that what you desire of me, most original of girls? Perhaps you are only seeking to amuse your provincial leisure with the follies which are you able to make a poet commit. If so, you have done a bad deed. Your two letters have enough of the spirit of mischief in them to force this doubt into the mind of a Parisian. But I am no longer master of myself; my life, my future depend on the answer you will make me. Tell me if the certainty of an unbounded affection, oblivious of all social conventions, will touch you,—if you will suffer me to seek you. There is anxiety enough and uncertainty enough in the question as to whether I can personally please you. If your reply is favorable I change my life, I bid adieu to all the irksome pleasures which we have the folly to call happiness. Happiness, my dear and beautiful unknown, is what you dream it to be,—a fusion of feelings, a perfect accordance of souls, the imprint of a noble ideal (such as God does permit us to form in this low world) upon the trivial round of daily life whose habits we must needs obey, a constancy of heart more precious far than what we call fidelity. Can we say that we make sacrifices when the end in view is our eternal good, the dream of poets, the dream of maidens, the poem which, at the entrance of life when thought essays its wings, each noble intellect has pondered and caressed only to see it shivered to fragments on some stone of stumbling as hard as it is vulgar?—for to the great majority of men, the foot of reality steps instantly on that mysterious egg so seldom hatched.

I cannot speak to you any more of myself; not of my past life, nor of my character, nor of an affection almost maternal on one side, filial on mine, which you have already seriously changed—an effect upon my life which must explain my use of the word “sacrifice.” You have already rendered me forgetful, if not ungrateful; does that satisfy you? Oh, speak! Say to me one word,

and I will love you till my eyes close in death, as the Marquis de Pescaire loved his wife, as Romeo loved Juliet, and faithfully. Our life will be, for me at least, that “felicity untroubled” which Dante made the very element of his Paradiso,—a poem far superior to his Inferno. Strange, it is not myself that I doubt in the long reverie through which, like you, I follow the windings of a dreamed existence; it is you. Yes, dear, I feel within me the power to love, and to love endlessly,—to march to the grave with gentle slowness and a smiling eye, with my beloved on my arm, and with never a cloud upon the sunshine of our souls. Yes, I dare to face our mutual old age, to see ourselves with whitening heads, like the venerable historian of Italy, inspired always with the same affection but transformed in soul by our life’s seasons. Hear me, I can no longer be your friend only. Though Chrysale, Geronte, and Argante re-live, you say, in me, I am not yet old enough to drink from the cup held to my lips by the sweet hands of a veiled woman without a passionate desire to tear off the domino and the mask and see the face. Either write me no more, or give me hope. Let me see you, or let me go. Must I bid you adieu? Will you permit me to sign myself,

Your Friend?
To Monsieur de Canalis,—What flattery! with what rapidity is the grave Anselme transformed into a handsome Leander! To what must I attribute such a change? to this black which I put upon this white? to these ideas which are to the flowers of my soul what a rose drawn in charcoal is to the roses in the garden? Or is it to a recollection of the young girl whom you took for me, and who is personally as like me as a waiting-woman is like her mistress? Have we changed roles? Have I the sense? have you the fancy? But a truce with jesting.

Your letter has made me know the elating pleasures of the soul; the first that I have known outside of my family affections. What, says a poet, are the ties of blood which are so strong in ordinary minds, compared to those divinely forged within us by mysterious sympathies? Let me thank you—no, we must not thank each other for such things—but God bless you for the happiness you have given me; be happy in the joy you have shed into my soul. You explain to me some of the apparent injustices in social life. There is something, I know not what, so dazzling, so virile in glory, that it belongs only to man; God forbids us women to wear its halo, but he makes love our portion, giving us the tenderness which soothes the brow scorched by his lightnings. I have felt my mission, and you have now confirmed it.

Sometimes, my friend, I rise in the morning in a state of inexpressible sweetness; a sort of peace, tender and divine, gives me an idea of heaven. My first thought is then like a benediction. I call these mornings my little German wakings, in opposition to my Southern sunsets, full of heroic deeds, battles, Roman fetes and ardent poems. Well, after reading your letter, so full of feverish impatience, I felt in my heart all the freshness of my celestial wakings, when I love the air about me and all nature, and fancy that I am destined to die for one I love. One of your poems, “The Maiden’s Song,” paints these delicious moments, when gaiety is tender, when aspiration is a need; it is one of my favorites. Do you want me to put all my flatteries into one?—well then, I think you worthy to be *me*!

Your letter, though short, enables me to read within you. Yes, I have guessed your tumultuous struggles, your piqued curiosity, your projects; but I do not yet know you well enough to satisfy your wishes. Hear me, dear; the mystery in which I am shrouded

allows me to use that word, which lets you see to the bottom of my heart. Hear me: if we once meet, adieu to our mutual comprehension! Will you make a compact with me? Was the first disadvantageous to you? But remember it won you my esteem, and it is a great deal, my friend, to gain an admiration lined throughout with esteem. Here is the compact: write me your life in a few words; then tell me what you do in Paris, day by day, with no reservations, and as if you were talking to some old friend. Well, having done that, I will take a step myself—I will see you, I promise you that. And it is a great deal.

This, dear, is no intrigue, no adventure; no gallantry, as you men say, can come of it, I warn you frankly. It involves my life, and more than that,—something that causes me remorse for the many thoughts that fly to you in flocks—it involves my father's and my mother's life. I adore them, and my choice must please them; they must find a son in you.

Tell me, to what extent can the superb spirits of your kind, to whom God has given the wings of his angels, without always adding their amiability,—how far can they bend under a family yoke, and put up with its little miseries? That is a text I have meditated upon. Ah! though I said to my heart before I came to you, Forward! Onward! it did not tremble and palpitate any the less on the way; and I did not conceal from myself the stoniness of the path nor the Alpine difficulties I had to encounter. I thought of all in my long, long meditations. Do I not know that eminent men like you have known the love they have inspired quite as well as that which they themselves have felt; that they have had many romances in their lives,—you particularly, who send forth those airy visions of your soul that women rush to buy? Yet still I cried to myself, "Onward!" because I have studied, more than you give me credit for, the geography of the great summits of humanity, which you tell me are so cold. Did you not say that Goethe and Byron were the colossi of egoism and poetry? Ah, my friend, there you shared a mistake into which superficial minds are apt to fall; but in you perhaps it came from generosity, false modesty, or the desire to escape from me. Vulgar minds may mistake the effect of toil for the development of personal character, but you must not. Neither Lord Byron, nor Goethe, nor Walter Scott, nor Cuvier, nor any inventor, belongs to himself, he is the slave of his idea. And this mysterious power is more jealous than a woman; it sucks their blood, it makes them live, it makes them die for its sake. The visible developments of their hidden existence do seem, in their results, like egotism; but who shall dare to say that the man who has abnegated self to give pleasure, instruction, or grandeur to his epoch, is an egoist? Is a mother selfish when she immolates all things to her child? Well, the detractors of genius do not perceive its fecund maternity, that is all. The life of a poet is so perpetual a sacrifice that he needs a gigantic organization to bear even the ordinary pleasures of life. Therefore, into what sorrows may he not fall when, like Moliere, he wishes to live the life of feeling in its most poignant crises; to me, remembering his personal life, Moliere's comedy is horrible.

The generosity of genius seems to me half divine; and I place you in this noble family of alleged egoists. Ah! if I had found self-interest, ambition, a seared nature where I now can see my best loved flowers of the soul, you know not what long anguish I should have had to bear. I met with disappointment before I was sixteen. What would have become of me had I learned at twenty that fame is a lie, that he whose books express the feelings hidden in my heart was incapable of feeling them himself? Oh! my friend, do you know what would have become of me? Shall I take you into the

recesses of my soul? I should have gone to my father and said, “Bring me the son-in-law whom you desire; my will abdicates,—marry me to whom you please.” And the man might have been a notary, banker, miser, fool, dullard, wearisome as a rainy day, common as the usher of a school, a manufacturer, or some brave soldier without two ideas,—he would have had a resigned and attentive servant in me. But what an awful suicide! never could my soul have expanded in the life-giving rays of a beloved sun. No murmur should have revealed to my father, or my mother, or my children the suicide of the creature who at this instant is shaking her fetters, casting lightnings from her eyes, and flying towards you with eager wing. See, she is there, at the angle of your desk, like Polyhymnia, breathing the air of your presence, and glancing about her with a curious eye. Sometimes in the fields where my husband would have taken me to walk, I should have wept, apart and secretly, at sight of a glorious morning; and in my heart, or hidden in a bureau-drawer, I might have kept some treasure, the comfort of poor girls ill-used by love, sad, poetic souls,—but ah! I have *you*, I believe in *you*, my friend. That belief straightens all my thoughts and fancies, even the most fantastic, and sometimes—see how far my frankness leads me—I wish I were in the middle of the book we are just beginning; such persistency do I feel in my sentiments, such strength in my heart to love, such constancy sustained by reason, such heroism for the duties for which I was created,—if indeed love can ever be transmuted into duty.

If you were able to follow me to the exquisite retreat where I fancy ourselves happy, if you knew my plans and projects, the dreadful word “folly!” might escape you, and I should be cruelly punished for sending poetry to a poet. Yes, I wish to be a spring of waters inexhaustible as a fertile land for the twenty years that nature allows me to shine. I want to drive away satiety by charm. I mean to be courageous for my friend as most women are for the world. I wish to vary happiness. I wish to put intelligence into tenderness, and to give piquancy to fidelity. I am filled with ambition to kill the rivals of the past, to conjure away all outside griefs by a wife’s gentleness, by her proud abnegation, to take a lifelong care of the nest,—such as birds can only take for a few weeks.

Tell me, do you now think me to blame for my first letter? The mysterious wind of will drove me to you, as the tempest brings the little rose-tree to the pollard window. In your letter, which I hold here upon my heart, you cried out, like your ancestor when he departed for the Crusades, “God wills it.”

Ah! but you will cry out, “What a chatterbox!” All the people round me say, on the contrary, “Mademoiselle is very taciturn.”

O. d’Este M.

CHAPTER XI. WHAT COMES OF CORRESPONDENCE

The foregoing letters seemed very original to the persons from whom the author of the “Comedy of Human Life” obtained them; but their interest in this duel, this crossing of pens between two minds, may not be shared. For every hundred readers, eighty might weary of the battle. The respect due to the majority in every nation under a constitutional government, leads us, therefore, to suppress eleven other letters exchanged between Ernest and Modeste during the month of September. If, later on, some flattering majority should arise to claim them, let us hope that we can then find means to insert them in their proper place.

Urged by a mind that seemed as aggressive as the heart was lovable, the truly chivalrous feelings of the poor secretary gave themselves free play in these suppressed letters, which seem, perhaps, more beautiful than they really are, because the imagination is charmed by a sense of the communion of two free souls. Ernest’s whole life was now wrapped up in these sweet scraps of paper; they were to him what banknotes are to a miser; while in Modeste’s soul a deep love took the place of her delight in agitating a glorious life, and being, in spite of distance, its mainspring. Ernest’s heart was the complement of Canalis’s glory. Alas! it often takes two men to make a perfect lover, just as in literature we compose a type by collecting the peculiarities of several similar characters. How many a time a woman has been heard to say in her own salon after close and intimate conversations:—

“Such a one is my ideal as to soul, and I love the other who is only a dream of the senses.”

The last letter written by Modeste, which here follows, gives us a glimpse of the enchanted isle to which the meanderings of this correspondence had led the two lovers.

To Monsieur de Canalis,—Be at Havre next Sunday; go to church; after the morning service, walk once or twice round the nave, and go out without speaking to any one; but wear a white rose in your button-hole. Then return to Paris, where you shall receive an answer. I warn you that this answer will not be what you wish; for, as I told you, the future is not yet mine. But should I not indeed be mad and foolish to say yes without having seen you? When I have seen you I can say no without wounding you; I can make sure that you shall not see me.

This letter had been sent off the evening before the day when the abortive struggle between Dumay and Modeste had taken place. The happy girl was impatiently awaiting Sunday, when her eyes were to vindicate or condemn her heart and her actions,—a solemn moment in the life of any woman, and which three months of close communion of souls now rendered as romantic as the most imaginative maiden could have wished. Every one, except the mother, had taken this torpor of expectation for the calm of innocence. No matter how firmly family laws and religious precepts may bind, there will always be the Clarissas and the Julies, whose souls like flowing cups o'erlap the brim under some spiritual pressure. Modeste was glorious in the savage energy with which she repressed her exuberant youthful happiness and remained demurely quiet. Let us say frankly that the memory of her sister was more potent upon her than any social conventions; her will was iron in the resolve to bring no grief upon her father and her mother. But what tumultuous heavings were within her breast! no wonder that a mother guessed them.

On the following day Modeste and Madame Dumay took Madame Mignon about mid-day to a seat in the sun among the flowers. The blind woman turned her wan and blighted face toward the ocean; she inhaled the odors of the sea and took the hand of her daughter who remained beside her. The mother hesitated between forgiveness and remonstrance ere she put the important question; for she comprehended the girl's love and recognized, as the pretended Canalis had done, that Modeste was exceptional in nature.

"God grant that your father return in time! If he delays much longer he will find none but you to love him. Modeste, promise me once more never to leave him," she said in a fond maternal tone.

Modeste lifted her mother's hands to her lips and kissed them gently, replying: "Need I say it again?"

"Ah, my child! I did this thing myself. I left my father to follow my husband; and yet my father was all alone; I was all the child he had. Is that why God has so punished me? What I ask of you is to marry as your father wishes, to cherish him in your heart, not to sacrifice him to your own happiness, but to make him the centre of your home. Before losing my sight, I wrote him all my wishes, and I know he will execute them. I enjoined him to keep his property intact and in his own hands; not that I distrust you, my Modeste, for a moment, but who can be sure of a son-in-law? Ah! my daughter, look at me; was I reasonable? One glance of the eye decided my life. Beauty, so often deceitful, in my case spoke true; but even were it the same with you, my poor child, swear to me that you will let your father inquire into the character, the habits, the heart, and the

previous life of the man you distinguish with your love—if, by chance, there is such a man."

"I will never marry without the consent of my father," answered Modeste.

"You see, my darling," said Madame Mignon after a long pause, "that if I am dying by inches through Bettina's wrong-doing, your father would not survive yours, no, not for a moment. I know him; he would put a pistol to his head,—there could be no life, no happiness on earth for him."

Modeste walked a few steps away from her mother, but immediately came back.

"Why did you leave me?" demanded Madame Mignon.

"You made me cry, mamma," answered Modeste.

"Ah, my little darling, kiss me. You love no one here? you have no lover, have you?" she asked, holding Modeste on her lap, heart to heart.

"No, my dear mamma," said the little Jesuit.

"Can you swear it?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Modeste.

Madame Mignon said no more; but she still doubted.

"At least, if you do choose your husband, you will tell your father?" she resumed.

"I promised that to my sister, and to you, mother. What evil do you think I could commit while I wear that ring upon my finger and read those words: 'Think of Bettina?' Poor sister!"

At these words a truce of silence came between the pair; the mother's blighted eyes rained tears which Modeste could not check, though she threw herself upon her knees, and cried: "Forgive me! oh, forgive me, mother!"

At this instant the excellent Dumay was coming up the hill of Ingouville on the double-quick,—a fact quite abnormal in the present life of the cashier.

Three letters had brought ruin to the Mignons; a single letter now restored their fortunes. Dumay had received from a sea-captain just arrived from the China Seas the following letter containing the first news of his patron and friend, Charles Mignon:—

To Monsieur Jean Dumay:

My Dear Dumay,—I shall quickly follow, barring the chances of the voyage, the vessel which carries this letter. In fact, I should have taken it, but I did not wish to leave my own ship to which I am accustomed.

I told you that no new was to be good news. But the first words of this letter ought to make you a happy man. I have made seven millions at the least. I am bringing back a large part of it in indigo, one third in safe London securities, and another third in good solid gold. Your remittances helped me to make the sum I had settled in my own mind much sooner than I expected. I wanted two millions for my daughters and a competence for myself.

I have been engaged in the opium trade with the largest houses in Canton, all ten times richer than ever I was. You have no idea, in Europe, what these rich East India merchants are. I went to Asia Minor and purchased opium at low prices, and from thence to Canton where I delivered my cargoes to the companies who control the trade. My last expedition was to the Philippine Islands where I exchanged opium for indigo of the first quality. In fact, I may have half a million more than I stated, for I reckoned the indigo at what it cost me. I have always been well in health; not the slightest illness. That is the result of working for one's children. Since the second year I have owned a pretty little brig of seven hundred tons, called the "Mignon." She is built of oak, double-planked, and copper-fastened; and all the interior fittings were done to suit me. She is, in fact, an additional piece of property.

A sea-life and the active habits required by my business have kept me in good health. To tell you all this is the same as telling it to my two daughters and my dear wife. I trust that the wretched man who took away my Bettina deserted her when he heard of my ruin; and that I shall find the poor lost lamb at the Chalet. My three dear women and my Dumay! All four of you have been ever present in my thoughts for the last three years. You are a rich man, now, Dumay. Your share, outside of my own fortune, amounts to five hundred and sixty thousand francs, for which I send you herewith a check, which can only be paid to you in person by the Mongenods, who have been duly advised from New York.

A few short months, and I shall see you all again, and all well, I trust. My dear Dumay, if I write this letter to you it is because I am anxious to keep my fortune a secret for the present. I therefore leave to you the happiness of preparing my dear angels for my return. I have had enough of commerce; and I am resolved to leave Havre. My intention is to buy back the estate of La Bastie, and to entail it, so as to establish an estate yielding at least a hundred thousand francs a year, and then to ask the king to grant that one of my sons-in-law may succeed to my name and title. You know, my poor Dumay, what a terrible misfortune overtook us through the fatal reputation of a large fortune,—my daughter's honor was lost. I have therefore resolved that the amount of my present fortune shall not be known. I shall not disembark at Havre, but at Marseilles. I shall sell my indigo, and negotiate for the purchase of La Bastie through the house of Mongenod in Paris. I shall put my funds in the Bank of France and return to the Chalet giving out that I have a considerable fortune in merchandise. My daughters will be supposed to have two or three hundred thousand francs. To choose which of my sons-in-law is worthy to succeed to my title and estates and to live with us, is now the object of my life; but both of them must be, like you and

me, honest, loyal, and firm men, and absolutely honorable.

My dear old fellow, I have never doubted you for a moment. We have gone through wars and commerce together and now we will undertake agriculture; you shall be my bailiff. You will like that, will you not? And so, old friend, I leave it to your discretion to tell what you think best to my wife and daughters; I rely upon your prudence. In four years great changes may have taken place in their characters.

Adieu, my old Dumay. Say to my daughters and to my wife that I have never failed to kiss them in my thoughts morning and evening since I left them. The second check for forty thousand francs herewith enclosed is for my wife and children.

Till we meet.—Your colonel and friend,

Charles Mignon.

"Your father is coming," said Madame Mignon to her daughter.

"What makes you think so, mamma?" asked Modeste.

"Nothing else could make Dumay hurry himself."

"Victory! victory!" cried the lieutenant as soon as he reached the garden gate. "Madame, the colonel has not been ill a moment; he is coming back—coming back on the 'Mignon,' a fine ship of his own, which together with its cargo is worth, he tells me, eight or nine hundred thousand francs. But he requires secrecy from all of us; his heart is still wrung by the misfortunes of our dear departed girl."

"He has still to learn her death," said Madame Mignon.

"He attributes her disaster, and I think he is right, to the rapacity of young men after great fortunes. My poor colonel expects to find the lost sheep here. Let us be happy among ourselves but say nothing to any one, not even to Latournelle, if that is possible. Mademoiselle," he whispered in Modeste's ear, "write to your father and tell him of his loss and also the terrible results on your mother's health and eyesight; prepare him for the shock he has to meet. I will engage to get the letter into his hands before he reaches Havre, for he will have to pass through Paris on his way. Write him a long letter; you have plenty of time. I will take the letter on Monday; Monday I shall probably go to Paris."

Modeste was so afraid that Canalis and Dumay would meet that she started hastily for the house to write to her poet and put off the rendezvous.

"Mademoiselle," said Dumay, in a very humble manner and barring Modeste's way, "may your father find his daughter with no other feelings in her heart than those she had for him and for her mother before he was obliged to leave her."

"I have sworn to myself, to my sister, and to my mother to be the joy, the consolation, and the glory of my father, and *I shall keep my oath*!" replied

Modeste with a haughty and disdainful glance at Dumay. “Do not trouble my delight in the thought of my father’s return with insulting suspicions. You cannot prevent a girl’s heart from beating—you don’t want me to be a mummy, do you?” she said. “My hand belongs to my family, but my heart is my own. If I love any one, my father and my mother will know it. Does that satisfy you, monsieur?”

“Thank you, mademoiselle; you restore me to life,” said Dumay, “but you might still call me Dumay, even when you box my ears!”

“Swear to me,” said her mother, “that you have not engaged a word or a look with any young man.”

“I can swear that, my dear mother,” said Modeste, laughing, and looking at Dumay who was watching her and smiling to himself like a mischievous girl.

“She must be false indeed if you are right,” cried Dumay, when Modeste had left them and gone into the house.

“My daughter Modeste may have faults,” said her mother, “but falsehood is not one of them; she is incapable of saying what is not true.”

“Well! then let us feel easy,” continued Dumay, “and believe that misfortune has closed his account with us.”

“God grant it!” answered Madame Mignon. “You will see *him*, Dumay; but I shall only hear him. There is much of sadness in my joy.”

CHAPTER XII. A DECLARATION OF LOVE,—SET TO MUSIC

At this moment Modeste, happy as she was in the return of her father, was, nevertheless, pacing her room disconsolate as Perrette on seeing her eggs broken. She had hoped her father would bring back a much larger fortune than Dumay had mentioned. Nothing could satisfy her new-found ambition on behalf of her poet less than at least half the six millions she had talked of in her second letter. Trebly agitated by her two joys and the grief caused by her comparative poverty, she seated herself at the piano, that confidant of so many young girls, who tell out their wishes and provocations on the keys, expressing them by the notes and tones of their music. Dumay was talking with his wife in the garden under the windows, telling her the secret of their own wealth, and questioning her as to her desires and her intentions. Madame Dumay had, like her husband, no other family than the Mignons. Husband and wife agreed, therefore, to go and live in Provence, if the Comte de La Bastie really meant to live in Provence, and to leave their money to whichever of Modeste's children might need it most.

"Listen to Modeste," said Madame Mignon, addressing them. "None but a girl in love can compose such airs without having studied music."

Houses may burn, fortunes be engulfed, fathers return from distant lands, empires may crumble away, the cholera may ravage cities, but a maiden's love wings its way as nature pursues hers, or that alarming acid which chemistry has lately discovered, and which will presently eat through the globe, if nothing stops it.

Modeste, under the inspiration of her present situation, was putting to music certain stanzas which we are compelled to quote here—albeit they are printed in the second volume of the edition Dauriat had mentioned—because, in order to adapt them to her music, which had the inexpressible charm of sentiment so admired in great singers, Modeste had taken liberties with the lines in a manner that may astonish the admirers of a poet so famous for the correctness, sometimes too precise, of his measures.

THE MAIDEN'S SONG

Hear, arise! the lark is shaking
  Sunlit wings that heavenward rise;
Sleep no more; the violet, waking,
  Wafts her incense to the skies.

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Flowers revived, their eyes unclosing,
  See themselves in drops of dew
In each calyx-cup reposing,
  Pearls of a day their mirror true.

Breeze divine, the god of roses,
  Passed by night to bless their bloom;
See! for him each bud uncloses,
  Glows, and yields its rich perfume.

Then arise! the lark is shaking
  Sunlit wings that heavenward rise;
Nought is sleeping—Heart, awaking,
  Lift thine incense to the skies.
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“It is very pretty,” said Madame Dumay. “Modeste is a musician, and that’s the whole of it.”

“The devil is in her!” cried the cashier, into whose heart the suspicion of the mother forced its way and made him shiver.

“She loves,” persisted Madame Mignon.

By succeeding, through the undeniable testimony of the song, in making the cashier a sharer in her belief as to the state of Modeste’s heart, Madame Mignon destroyed the happiness the return and the prosperity of his master had brought him. The poor Breton went down the hill to Havre and to his desk in Gobenheim’s counting-room with a heavy heart; then, before returning to dinner, he went to see Latournelle, to tell his fears, and beg once more for the notary’s advice and assistance.

“Yes, my dear friend,” said Dumay, when they parted on the steps of the notary’s door, “I now agree with madame; she loves,—yes, I am sure of it; and the devil knows the rest. I am dishonored.”

“Don’t make yourself unhappy, Dumay,” answered the little notary. “Among us all we can surely get the better of the little puss; sooner or later, every girl in love betrays herself,—you may be sure of that. But we will talk about it this evening.”

Thus it happened that all those devoted to the Mignon family were fully as disquieted and uncertain as they were before the old soldier tried the experiment which he expected would be so decisive. The ill-success of his past efforts so stimulated Dumay’s sense of duty, that he determined not to go to Paris to see after his own fortune as announced by his patron, until he had guessed the riddle of Modeste’s heart. These friends, to whom feelings were more precious than interests, well knew that unless the daughter were pure and innocent, the father would die of grief when he came to know the death of Bettina and the blindness of his wife. The distress of poor Dumay made such an impression on the

Latournelles that they even forgot their parting with Exupere, whom they had sent off that morning to Paris. During dinner, while the three were alone, Monsieur and Madame Latournelle and Butscha turned the problem over and over in their minds, and discussed every aspect of it.

“If Modeste loved any one in Havre she would have shown some fear yesterday,” said Madame Latournelle; “her lover, therefore, lives somewhere else.”

“She swore to her mother this morning,” said the notary, “in presence of Dumay, that she had not exchanged a look or a word with any living soul.”

“Then she loves after my fashion!” exclaimed Butscha.

“And how is that, my poor lad?” asked Madame Latournelle.

“Madame,” said the little cripple, “I love alone and afar—oh! as far as from here to the stars.”

“How do you manage it, you silly fellow?” said Madame Latournelle, laughing.

“Ah, madame!” said Butscha, “what you call my hump is the socket of my wings.”

“So that is the explanation of your seal, is it?” cried the notary.

Butscha’s seal was a star, and under it the words “Fulgens, sequar,”—“Shining One, I follow thee,”—the motto of the house of Chastillonest.

“A beautiful woman may feel as distrustful as the ugliest,” said Butscha, as if speaking to himself; “Modeste is clever enough to fear she may be loved only for her beauty.”

Hunchbacks are extraordinary creations, due entirely to society for, according to Nature’s plan, feeble or aborted beings ought to perish. The curvature or distortion of the spinal column creates in these outwardly deformed subjects as it were a storage-battery, where the nerve currents accumulate more abundantly than under normal conditions,—where they develop, and whence they are emitted, so to say, in lightning flashes, to energize the interior being. From this, forces result which are sometimes brought to light by magnetism, though they are far more frequently lost in the vague spaces of the spiritual world. It is rare to find a deformed person who is not gifted with some special faculty,—a whimsical or sparkling gaiety perhaps, an utter malignity, or an almost sublime goodness. Like instruments which the hand of art can never fully waken, these beings, highly privileged though they know it not, live within themselves, as Butscha lived, provided their natural forces so magnificently concentrated have

not been spent in the struggle they have been forced to maintain, against tremendous odds, to keep alive. This explains many superstitions, the popular legends of gnomes, frightful dwarfs, deformed fairies,—all that race of bottles, as Rabelais called them, containing elixirs and precious balms.

Butscha, therefore, had very nearly found the key to the puzzle. With all the anxious solicitude of a hopeless lover, a vassal ever ready to die,—like the soldiers alone and abandoned in the snows of Russia, who still cried out, “Long live the Emperor,”—he meditated how to capture Modeste’s secret for his own private knowledge. So thinking, he followed his patrons to the Chalet that evening, with a cloud of care upon his brow: for he knew it was most important to hide from all these watchful eyes and ears the net, whatever it might be, in which he should entrap his lady. It would have to be, he thought, by some intercepted glance, some sudden start or quiver, as when a surgeon lays his finger on a hidden sore. That evening Gobenheim did not appear, and Butscha was Dumay’s partner against Monsieur and Madame Latournelle. During the few moment’s of Modeste’s absence, about nine o’clock, to prepare for her mother’s bedtime, Madame Mignon and her friends spoke openly to one another; but the poor clerk, depressed by the conviction of Modeste’s love, which had now seized upon him as upon the rest, seemed as remote from the discussion as Gobenheim had been the night before.

“Well, what’s the matter with you, Butscha?” cried Madame Latournelle; “one would really think you hadn’t a friend in the world.”

Tears shone in the eyes of the poor fellow, who was the son of a Swedish sailor, and whose mother was dead.

“I have no one in the world but you,” he answered with a troubled voice; “and your compassion is so much a part of your religion that I can never lose it—and I will never deserve to lose it.”

This answer struck the sensitive chord of true delicacy in the minds of all present.

“We love you, Monsieur Butscha,” said Madame Mignon, with much feeling in her voice.

“I’ve six hundred thousand francs of my own, this day,” cried Dumay, “and you shall be a notary and the successor of Latournelle.”

The American wife took the hand of the poor hunchback and pressed it.

“What! you have six hundred thousand francs!” exclaimed Latournelle, pricking up his ears as Dumay let fall the words; “and you allow these ladies to live as they do! Modeste ought to have a fine horse; and why doesn’t she

continue to take lessons in music, and painting, and—”

“Why, he has only had the money a few hours!” cried the little wife.

“Hush!” murmured Madame Mignon.

While these words were exchanged, Butscha’s august mistress turned towards him, preparing to make a speech:—

“My son,” she said, “you are so surrounded by true affection that I never thought how my thoughtless use of that familiar phrase might be construed; but you must thank me for my little blunder, because it has served to show you what friends your noble qualities have won.”

“Then you must have news from Monsieur Mignon,” resumed the notary.

“He is on his way home,” said Madame Mignon; “but let us keep the secret to ourselves. When my husband learns how faithful Butscha has been to us, how he has shown us the warmest and the most disinterested friendship when others have given us the cold shoulder, he will not let you alone provide for him, Dumay. And so, my friend,” she added, turning her blind face toward Butscha; “you can begin at once to negotiate with Latournelle.”

“He’s of legal age, twenty-five and a half years. As for me, it will be paying a debt, my boy, to make the purchase easy for you,” said the notary.

Butscha was kissing Madame Mignon’s hand, and his face was wet with tears as Modeste opened the door of the salon.

“What are you doing to my Black Dwarf?” she demanded. “Who is making him unhappy?”

“Ah! Mademoiselle Mignon, do we luckless fellows, cradled in misfortune, ever weep for grief? They have just shown me as much affection as I could feel for them if they were indeed my own relations. I’m to be a notary; I shall be rich. Ha! ha! the poor Butscha may become the rich Butscha. You don’t know what audacity there is in this abortion,” he cried.

With that he gave himself a resounding blow on the cavity of his chest and took up a position before the fireplace, after casting a glance at Modeste, which slipped like a ray of light between his heavy half-closed eyelids. He perceived, in this unexpected incident, a chance of interrogating the heart of his sovereign. Dumay thought for a moment that the clerk dared to aspire to Modeste, and he exchanged a rapid glance with the others, who understood him, and began to eye the little man with a species of terror mingled with curiosity.

“I, too, have my dreams,” said Butscha, not taking his eyes from Modeste.

The young girl lowered her eyelids with a movement that was a revelation to

the young man.

“You love romance,” he said, addressing her. “Let me, in this moment of happiness, tell you mine; and you shall tell me in return whether the conclusion of the tale I have invented for my life is possible. To me wealth would bring greater happiness than to other men; for the highest happiness I can imagine would be to enrich the one I loved. You, mademoiselle, who know so many things, tell me if it is possible for a man to make himself beloved independently of his person, be it handsome or ugly, and for his spirit only?”

Modeste raised her eyes and looked at Butscha. It was a piercing and questioning glance; for she shared Dumay’s suspicion of Butscha’s motive.

“Let me be rich, and I will seek some beautiful poor girl, abandoned like myself, who has suffered, who knows what misery is. I will write to her and console her, and be her guardian spirit; she shall read my heart, my soul; she shall possess by double wealth, my two wealths,—my gold, delicately offered, and my thought robed in all the splendor which the accident of birth has denied to my grotesque body. But I myself shall remain hidden like the cause that science seeks. God himself may not be glorious to the eye. Well, naturally, the maiden will be curious; she will wish to see me; but I shall tell her that I am a monster of ugliness; I shall picture myself hideous.”

At these words Modeste gave Butscha a glance that looked him through and through. If she had said aloud, “What do you know of my love?” she could not have been more explicit.

“If I have the honor of being loved for the poem of my heart, if some day such love may make a woman think me only slightly deformed, I ask you, mademoiselle, shall I not be happier than the handsomest of men,—as happy as a man of genius beloved by some celestial being like yourself.”

The color which suffused the young girl’s face told the cripple nearly all he sought to know.

“Well, if that be so,” he went on, “if we enrich the one we love, if we please the spirit and withdraw the body, is not that the way to make one’s self beloved? At any rate it is the dream of your poor dwarf,—a dream of yesterday; for to-day your mother gives me the key to future wealth by promising me the means of buying a practice. But before I become another Gobenheim, I seek to know whether this dream could be really carried out. What do you say, mademoiselle, *you*?”

Modeste was so astonished that she did not notice the question. The trap of the lover was much better baited than that of the soldier, for the poor girl was

rendered speechless.

“Poor Butscha!” whispered Madame Latournelle to her husband. “Do you think he is going mad?”

“You want to realize the story of Beauty and the Beast,” said Modeste at length; “but you forget that the Beast turned into Prince Charming.”

“Do you think so?” said the dwarf. “Now I have always thought that that transformation meant the phenomenon of the soul made visible, obliterating the form under the light of the spirit. If I were not loved I should stay hidden, that is all. You and yours, madame,” he continued, addressing his mistress, “instead of having a dwarf at your service, will now have a life and a fortune.”

So saying, Butscha resumed his seat, remarking to the three whist-players with an assumption of calmness, “Whose deal is it?” but within his soul he whispered sadly to himself: “She wants to be loved for herself; she corresponds with some pretended great man; how far has it gone?”

“Dear mamma, it is nearly ten o’clock,” said Modeste.

Madame Mignon said good-night to her friends, and went to bed.

They who wish to love in secret may have Pyrenean hounds, mothers, Dumays, and Latournelles to spy upon them, and yet not be in any danger; but when it comes to a lover!—ah! that is diamond cut diamond, flame against flame, mind to mind, an equation whose terms are mutual.

On Sunday morning Butscha arrived at the Chalet before Madame Latournelle, who always came to take Modeste to church, and he proceeded to blockade the house in expectation of the postman.

“Have you a letter for Mademoiselle Mignon?” he said to that humble functionary when he appeared.

“No, monsieur, none.”

“This house has been a good customer to the post of late,” remarked the clerk.

“You may well say that,” replied the man.

Modeste both heard and saw the little colloquy from her chamber window, where she always posted herself behind the blinds at this particular hour to watch for the postman. She ran downstairs, went into the little garden, and called in an imperative voice:—

“Monsieur Butscha!”

“Here am I, mademoiselle,” said the cripple, reaching the gate as Modeste herself opened it.

“Will you be good enough to tell me whether among your various titles to a woman’s affection you count that of the shameless spying in which you are now engaged?” demanded the girl, endeavoring to crush her slave with the glance and gesture of a queen.

“Yes, mademoiselle,” he answered proudly. “Ah! I never expected,” he continued in a low tone, “that the grub could be of service to a star,—but so it is. Would you rather that your mother and Monsieur Dumay and Madame Latournelle had guessed your secret than one, excluded as it were from life, who seeks to be to you one of those flowers that you cut and wear for a moment? They all know you love; but I, I alone, *know how*. Use me as you would a vigilant watch-dog; I will obey you, protect you, and never bark; neither will I condemn you. I ask only to be of service to you. Your father has made Dumay keeper of the hen-roost, take Butscha to watch outside,—poor Butscha, who doesn’t ask for anything, not so much as a bone.”

“Well, I’ve give you a trial,” said Modeste, whose strongest desire was to get rid of so clever a watcher. “Please go at once to all the hotels in Graville and in Havre, and ask if a gentleman has arrived from England named Monsieur Arthur —”

“Listen to me, mademoiselle,” said Butscha, interrupting Modeste respectfully. “I will go and take a walk on the seashore, for you don’t want me to go to church to-day; that’s what it is.”

Modeste looked at her dwarf with a perfectly stupid astonishment.

“Mademoiselle, you have wrapped your face in cotton-wool and a silk handkerchief, but there’s nothing the matter with you; and you have put that thick veil on your bonnet to see some one yourself without being seen.”

“Where did you acquire all that perspicacity?” cried Modeste, blushing.

“Moreover, mademoiselle, you have not put on your corset; a cold in the head wouldn’t oblige you to disfigure your waist and wear half a dozen petticoats, nor hide your hands in these old gloves, and your pretty feet in those hideous shoes, nor dress yourself like a beggar-woman, nor—”

“That’s enough,” she said. “How am I to be certain that you will obey me?”

“My master is obliged to go to Sainte-Adresse. He does not like it, but he is so truly good he won’t deprive me of my Sunday; I will offer to go for him.”

“Go, and I will trust you.”

“You are sure I can do nothing for you in Havre?”

“Nothing. Hear me, mysterious dwarf,—look,” she continued, pointing to the

cloudless sky; “can you see a single trace of that bird that flew by just now? No; well then, my actions are pure as the air is pure, and leave no stain behind them. You may reassure Dumay and the Latournelles, and my mother. That hand,” she said, holding up a pretty delicate hand, with the points of the rosy fingers, through which the light shone, slightly turning back, “will never be given, it will never even be kissed by what people call a lover until my father has returned.”

“Why don’t you want me in the church to-day?”

“Do you venture to question me after all I have done you the honor to say, and to ask of you?”

Butscha bowed without another word, and departed to find his master, in all the rapture of being taken into the service of his goddess.

Half an hour later, Monsieur and Madame Latournelle came to fetch Modeste, who complained of a horrible toothache.

“I really have not had the courage to dress myself,” she said.

“Well then,” replied the worthy chaperone, “stay at home.”

“Oh, no!” said Modeste. “I would rather not. I have bundled myself up, and I don’t think it will do me any harm to go out.”

And Mademoiselle Mignon marched off beside Latournelle, refusing to take his arm lest she should be questioned about the outward trembling which betrayed her inward agitation at the thought of at last seeing her great poet. One look, the first,—was it not about to decide her fate?

CHAPTER XIII. A FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT OF MONSIEUR DE LA BRIERE

Is there in the life of man a more delightful moment than that of a first rendezvous? Are the sensations then hidden at the bottom of our hearts and finding their first expression ever renewed? Can we feel again the nameless pleasures that we felt when, like Ernest de La Briere, we looked up our sharpest razors, our finest shirt, an irreproachable collar, and our best clothes? We deify the garments associated with that all-supreme moment. We weave within us poetic fancies quite equal to those of the woman; and the day when either party guesses them they take wings to themselves and fly away. Are not such things like the flower of wild fruits, bitter-sweet, grown in the heart of a forest, the joy of the scant sun-rays, the joy, as Canalis says in the “Maiden’s Song,” of the plant itself whose eyes unclosing see its own image within its breast?

Such emotions, now taking place in La Briere, tend to show that, like other poor fellows for whom life begins in toil and care, he had never yet been loved. Arriving at Havre overnight, he had gone to bed at once, like a true coquette, to obliterate all traces of fatigue; and now, after taking his bath, he had put himself into a costume carefully adapted to show him off to the best advantage. This is, perhaps, the right moment to exhibit a full-length portrait of him, if only to justify the last letter that Modeste was still to write to him.

Born of a good family in Toulouse, and allied by marriage to the minister who first took him under his protection, Ernest had that air of good-breeding which comes of an education begun in the cradle; and the habit of managing business affairs gave him a certain sedateness which was not pedantic,—though pedantry is the natural outgrowth of premature gravity. He was of ordinary height; his face, which won upon all who saw him by its delicacy and sweetness, was warm in the flesh-tints, though without color, and relieved by a small moustache and imperial a la Mazarin. Without this evidence of virility he might have resembled a young woman in disguise, so refined was the shape of his face and the cut of his lips, so feminine the transparent ivory of a set of teeth, regular enough to have seemed artificial. Add to these womanly points a habit of speech as gentle as the expression of the face; as gentle, too, as the blue eyes with their Turkish eyelids, and you will readily understand how it was that the minister occasionally called his young secretary Mademoiselle de La Briere. The full,

clear forehead, well framed by abundant black hair, was dreamy, and did not contradict the character of the face, which was altogether melancholy. The prominent arch of the upper eyelid, though very beautifully cut, overshadowed the glance of the eye, and added a physical sadness,—if we may so call it,—produced by the droop of the lid over the eyeball. This inward doubt or eclipse—which is put into language by the word modesty—was expressed in his whole person. Perhaps we shall be able to make his appearance better understood if we say that the logic of design required greater length in the oval of his head, more space between the chin, which ended abruptly, and the forehead, which was reduced in height by the way in which the hair grew. The face had, in short, a rather compressed appearance. Hard work had already drawn furrows between the eyebrows, which were somewhat too thick and too near together, like those of a jealous nature. Though La Briere was then slight, he belonged to the class of temperaments which begin, after they are thirty, to take on an unexpected amount of flesh.

The young man would have seemed to a student of French history a very fair representative of the royal and almost inconceivable figure of Louis XIII.,—that historical figure of melancholy modesty without known cause; pallid beneath the crown; loving the dangers of war and the fatigues of hunting, but hating work; timid with his mistress to the extent of keeping away from her; so indifferent as to allow the head of his friend to be cut off,—a figure that nothing can explain but his remorse for having avenged his father on his mother. Was he a Catholic Hamlet, or merely the victim of incurable disease? But the undying worm which gnawed at the king’s vitals was in Ernest’s case simply distrust of himself,—the timidity of a man to whom no woman had ever said, “Ah, how I love thee!” and, above all, the spirit of self-devotion without an object. After hearing the knell of the monarchy in the fall of his patron’s ministry, the poor fellow had next fallen upon a rock covered with exquisite mosses, named Canalis; he was, therefore, still seeking a power to love, and this spaniel-like search for a master gave him outwardly the air of a king who has met with his. This play of feeling, and a general tone of suffering in the young man’s face made it more really beautiful than he was himself aware of; for he had always been annoyed to find himself classed by women among the “handsome disconsolate,”—a class which has passed out of fashion in these days, when every man seeks to blow his own trumpet and put himself in the advance.

The self-distrustful Ernest now rested his immediate hopes on the fashionable clothes he intended to wear. He put on, for this sacred interview, where everything depended on a first impression, a pair of black trousers and carefully

polished boots, a sulphur-colored waistcoat, which left to sight an exquisitely fine shirt with opal buttons, a black cravat, and a small blue surtout coat which seemed glued to his back and shoulders by some newly-invented process. The ribbon of the Legion of honor was in his buttonhole. He wore a well-fitting pair of kid gloves of the Florentine bronze color, and carried his cane and hat in the left hand with a gesture and air that was worthy of the Grand Monarch, and enabled him to show, as the sacred precincts required, his bare head with the light falling on his carefully arranged hair. He stationed himself before the service began in the church porch, from whence he could examine the church, and the Christians—more particularly the female Christians—who dipped their fingers in the holy water.

An inward voice cried to Modeste as she entered, “It is he!” That surtout, and indeed the whole bearing of the young man were essentially Parisian; the ribbon, the gloves, the cane, the very perfume of his hair were not of Havre. So when La Briere turned about to examine the tall and imposing Madame Latournelle, the notary, and the bundled-up (expression sacred to women) figure of Modeste, the poor child, though she had carefully tutored herself for the event, received a violent blow on her heart when her eyes rested on this poetic figure, illuminated by the full light of day as it streamed through the open door. She could not be mistaken; a small white rose nearly hid the ribbon of the Legion. Would he recognize his unknown mistress muffled in an old bonnet with a double veil? Modeste was so in fear of love’s clairvoyance that she began to stoop in her walk like an old woman.

“Wife,” said little Latournelle as they took their seats, “that gentleman does not belong to Havre.”

“So many strangers come here,” answered his wife.

“But,” said the notary, “strangers never come to look at a church like ours, which is less than two centuries old.”

Ernest remained in the porch throughout the service without seeing any woman who realized his hopes. Modeste, on her part, could not control the trembling of her limbs until Mass was nearly over. She was in the grasp of a joy that none but she herself could depict. At last she heard the foot-fall of a gentleman on the pavement of the aisle. The service over, La Briere was making a circuit of the church, where no one now remained but the punctiliously pious, whom he proceeded to subject to a shrewd and keen analysis. Ernest noticed that a prayer-book shook violently in the hands of a veiled woman as he passed her; as she alone kept her face hidden his suspicions were aroused, and then confirmed by Modeste’s dress, which the lover’s eye now scanned and noted. He

left the church with the Latournelles and followed them at a distance to the rue Royale, where he saw them enter a house accompanied by Modeste, whose custom it was to stay with her friends till the hour of vespers. After examining the little house, which was ornamented with scutcheons, he asked the name of the owner, and was told that he was Monsieur Latournelle, the chief notary in Havre. As Ernest lounged along the rue Royale hoping for a glimpse into the house, Modeste caught sight of him, and thereupon declared herself too ill to go to vespers. Poor Ernest thus had his trouble for his pains. He dared not wander about Ingouville; moreover, he made it a point of honor to obey orders, and he therefore went back to Paris, previously writing a letter which Francoise Cochet duly delivered on the morrow with the Havre postmark.

It was the custom of Monsieur and Madame Latournelle to dine at the Chalet every Sunday when they brought back Modeste after vespers. So, as soon as the invalid felt a little better, they started for Ingouville, accompanied by Butscha. Once at home, the happy Modeste forgot her pretended illness and her disguise, and dressed herself charmingly, humming as she came down to dinner,—

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“Nought is sleeping—Heart! awaking,
Lift thine incense to the skies.”
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Butscha shuddered slightly when he caught sight of her, so changed did she seem to him. The wings of love were fastened to her shoulders; she had the air of a nymph, a Psyche; her cheeks glowed with the divine color of happiness.

“Who wrote the words to which you have put that pretty music?” asked her mother.

“Canalis, mamma,” she answered, flushing rosy red from her throat to her forehead.

“Canalis!” cried the dwarf, to whom the inflections of the girl’s voice and her blush told the only thing of which he was still ignorant. “He, that great poet, does he write songs?”

“They are only simple verses,” she said, “which I have ventured to set to German airs.”

“No, no,” interrupted Madame Mignon, “the music is your own, my daughter.”

Modeste, feeling that she grew more and more crimson, went off into the garden, calling Butscha after her.

“You can do me a great service,” she said. “Dumay is keeping a secret from my mother and me as to the fortune which my father is bringing back with him; and I want to know what it is. Did not Dumay send papa when he first went

away over five hundred thousand francs? Yes. Well, papa is not the kind of man to stay away four years and only double his capital. It seems he is coming back on a ship of his own, and Dumay's share amounts to almost six hundred thousand francs."

"There is no need to question Dumay," said Butscha. "Your father lost, as you know, about four millions when he went away, and he has doubtless recovered them. He would of course give Dumay ten per cent of his profits; the worthy man admitted the other day how much it was, and my master and I think that in that case the colonel's fortune must amount to six or seven millions—"

"Oh, papa!" cried Modeste, crossing her hands on her breast and looking up to heaven, "twice you have given me life!"

"Ah, mademoiselle!" said Butscha, "you love a poet. That kind of man is more or less of a Narcissus. Will he know how to love you? A phrase-maker, always busy in fitting words together, must be a bore. Mademoiselle, a poet is no more poetry than a seed is a flower."

"Butscha, I never saw so handsome a man."

"Beauty is a veil which often serves to hide imperfections."

"He has the most angelic heart of heaven—"

"I pray God you may be right," said the dwarf, clasping his hands, "—and happy! That man shall have, as you have, a servant in Jean Butscha. I will not be notary; I shall give that up; I shall study the sciences."

"Why?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, to train up your children, if you will deign to make me their tutor. But, oh! if you would only listen to some advice. Let me take up this matter; let me look into the life and habits of this man,—find out if he is kind, or bad-tempered, or gentle, if he commands the respect which you merit in a husband, if he is able to love utterly, preferring you to everything, even his own talent—"

"What does that signify if I love him?"

"Ah, true!" cried the dwarf.

At that instant Madame Mignon was saying to her friends,—

"My daughter saw the man she loves this morning."

"Then it must have been that sulphur waistcoat which puzzled you so, Latournelle," said his wife. "The young man had a pretty white rose in his buttonhole."

“Ah!” sighed the mother, “the sign of recognition.”

“And he also wore the ribbon of an officer of the Legion of honor. He is a charming young man. But we are all deceiving ourselves; Modeste never raised her veil, and her clothes were huddled on like a beggar-woman’s—”

“And she said she was ill,” cried the notary; “but she has taken off her mufflings and is just as well as she ever was.”

“It is incomprehensible!” said Dumay.

“Not at all,” said the notary; “it is now as clear as day.”

“My child,” said Madame Mignon to Modeste, as she came into the room, followed by Butscha, “did you see a well-dressed young man at church this morning, with a white rose in his button-hole?”

“I saw him,” said Butscha quickly, perceiving by everybody’s strained attention that Modeste was likely to fall into a trap. “It was Grindot, the famous architect, with whom the town is in treaty for the restoration of the church. He has just come from Paris, and I met him this morning examining the exterior as I was on my way to Sainte-Adresse.”

“Oh, an architect, was he? he puzzled me,” said Modeste, for whom Butscha had thus gained time to recover herself.

Dumay looked askance at Butscha. Modeste, fully warned, recovered her impenetrable composure. Dumay’s distrust was now thoroughly aroused, and he resolved to go the mayor’s office early in the morning and ascertain if the architect had really been in Havre the previous day. Butscha, on the other hand, was equally determined to go to Paris and find out something about Canalis.

Gobenheim came to play whist, and by his presence subdued and compressed all this fermentation of feelings. Modeste awaited her mother’s bedtime with impatience. She intended to write, but never did so except at night. Here is the letter which love dictated to her while all the world was sleeping:—

To Monsieur de Canalis,—Ah! my friend, my well-beloved! What atrocious falsehoods those portraits in the shop-windows are! And I, who made that horrible lithograph my joy!—I am humbled at the thought of loving one so handsome. No; it is impossible that those Parisian women are so stupid as not to have seen their dreams fulfilled in you. You neglected! you unloved! I do not believe a word of all that you have written me about your lonely and obscure life, your hunger for an idol,—sought in vain until now. You have been too well loved, monsieur; your brow, white and smooth as a magnolia leaf, reveals it; and it is I who must be neglected,—for who am I? Ah! why have you called me to life? I felt for a moment as though the heavy burden of the flesh was leaving me; my soul had broken the crystal which held it captive; it pervaded my whole being; the cold silence of material things had ceased; all things in nature had a voice and spoke to me. The old church was luminous. It's arched roof, brilliant with gold and azure like those of an Italian cathedral, sparkled above my head. Melodies such as the angels sang to martyrs, quieting their pains, sounded from the organ. The rough pavements of Havre seemed to my feet a flowery mead; the sea spoke to me with a voice of sympathy, like an old friend whom I had never truly understood. I saw clearly how the roses in my garden had long adored me and bidden me love; they lifted their heads and smiled as I came back from church. I heard your name, "Melchior," chiming in the flower-bells; I saw it written on the clouds. Yes, yes, I live, I am living, thanks to thee,—my poet, more beautiful than that cold, conventional Lord Byron, with a face as dull as the English climate. One glance of thine, thine Orient glance, pierced through my double veil and sent thy blood to my heart, and from thence to my head and feet. Ah! that is not the life our mother gave us. A hurt to thee would hurt me too at the very instant it was given,—my life exists by thy thought only. I know now the purpose of the divine faculty of music; the angels invented it to utter love. Ah, my Melchior, to have genius and to have beauty is too much; a man should be made to choose between them at his birth.

When I think of the treasures of tenderness and affection which you have given me, and more especially for the last month, I ask myself if I dream. No, but you hide some mystery; what woman can yield you up to me and not die? Ah! jealousy has entered my heart with love,—love in which I could not have believed. How could I have imagined so mighty a conflagration? And now—strange and inconceivable revulsion!—I would rather you were ugly.

What follies I committed after I came home! The yellow dahlias reminded me of your waistcoat, the white roses were my loving friends; I bowed to them with a look that belonged to you, like all that is of me. The very color of the gloves, moulded to hands of a gentleman, your step along the nave,—all, all, is so printed on my memory that sixty years hence I shall see the veriest trifles of this day of days,—the color of the atmosphere, the ray of sunshine that flickered on a certain pillar; I shall hear the prayer your step interrupted; I shall inhale the incense of the altar; forever I shall feel above our heads the priestly hands that blessed us both as you passed by me at the closing benediction. The good Abbe Marcelin married us then! The happiness, above that of earth, which I feel in this new world of unexpected emotions can only be equalled by the joy of telling it to you, of sending it back to him who poured it into my heart with the lavishness of the sun itself. No more veils, no more disguises, my beloved. Come back to me, oh, come back soon. With joy I now unmask.

You have no doubt heard of the house of Mignon in Havre? Well, I

am, through an irreparable misfortune, its sole heiress. But you are not to look down upon us, descendant of an Auvergne knight; the arms of the Mignon de La Bastie will do no dishonor to those of Canalis. We bear gules, on a bend sable four bezants or; quarterly four crosses patriarchal or; a cardinal's hat as crest, and the fiocchi for supports. Dear, I will be faithful to our motto: "Una fides, unus Dominus!"—the true faith, and one only Master.

Perhaps, my friend, you will find some irony in my name, after all that I have done, and all that I herein avow. I am named Modeste. Therefore I have not deceived you by signing "O. d'Este M." Neither have I misled you about our fortune; it will amount, I believe, to the sum which rendered you so virtuous. I know that to you money is a consideration of small importance; therefore I speak of it without reserve. Let me tell you how happy it makes me to give freedom of action to our happiness,—to be able to say, when the fancy for travel takes us, "Come, let us go in a comfortable carriage, sitting side by side, without a thought of money"—happy, in short, to tell the king, "I have the fortune which you require in your peers." Thus Modeste Mignon can be of service to you, and her gold will have the noblest of uses.

As to your servant herself,—you did see her once, at her window. Yes, "the fairest daughter of Eve the fair" was indeed your unknown damozel; but how little the Modeste of to-day resembles her of that long past era! That one was in her shroud, this one —have I made you know it?—has received from you the life of life. Love, pure, and sanctioned, the love my father, now returning rich and prosperous, will authorize, has raised me with its powerful yet childlike hand from the grave in which I slept. You have wakened me as the sun wakens the flowers. The eyes of your beloved are no longer those of the little Modeste so daring in her ignorance,—no, they are dimmed with the sight of happiness, and the lids close over them. To-day I tremble lest I can never deserve my fate. The king has come in his glory; my lord has now a subject who asks pardon for the liberties she has taken, like the gambler with loaded dice after cheating Monsieur de Grammont.

My cherished poet! I will be thy Mignon—happier far than the Mignon of Goethe, for thou wilt leave me in mine own land,—in thy heart. Just as I write this pledge of our betrothal a nightingale in the Vilquin park answers for thee. Ah, tell me quick that his note, so pure, so clear, so full, which fills my heart with joy and love like an Annunciation, does not lie to me.

My father will pass through Paris on his way from Marseilles; the house of Mongenod, with whom he corresponds, will know his address. Go to him, my Melchior, tell him that you love me; but do not try to tell him how I love you,—let that be forever between ourselves and God. I, my dear one, am about to tell everything to my mother. Her heart will justify my conduct; she will rejoice in our secret poem, so romantic, human and divine in one.

You have the confession of the daughter; you must now obtain the consent of the Comte de La Bastie, father of your

Modeste.

P.S.—Above all, do not come to Havre without having first obtained my father's consent. If you love me you will not fail to find him on his way through Paris.

"What are you doing, up at this hour, Mademoiselle Modeste?" said the voice

of Dumay at her door.

“Writing to my father,” she answered; “did you not tell me you should start in the morning?”

Dumay had nothing to say to that, and he went to bed, while Modeste wrote another long letter, this time to her father.

On the morrow, Francois Cochet, terrified at seeing the Havre postmark on the envelope which Ernest had mailed the night before, brought her young mistress the following letter and took away the one which Modeste had written:—

To Mademoiselle O. d’Este M.,—My heart tells me that you were the woman so carefully veiled and disguised, and seated between Monsieur and Madame Latournelle, who have but one child, a son. Ah, my love, if you have only a modest station, without distinction, without importance, without money even, you do not know how happy that would make me. You ought to understand me by this time; why will you not tell me the truth? I am no poet, —except in heart, through love, through you. Oh! what power of affection there is in me to keep me here in this hotel, instead of mounting to Ingouville which I can see from my windows. Will you ever love me as I love you? To leave Havre in such uncertainty! Am I not punished for loving you as if I had committed a crime? But I obey you blindly. Let me have a letter quickly, for if you have been mysterious, I have returned you mystery for mystery, and I must at last throw off my disguise, show you the poet that I am, and abdicate my borrowed glory.

This letter made Modeste terribly uneasy. She could not get back the one which Francoise had carried away before she came to the last words, whose meaning she now sought by reading them again and again; but she went to her own room and wrote an answer in which she demanded an immediate explanation.

CHAPTER XIV. MATTERS GROWN COMPLICATED

During these little events other little events were going on in Havre, which caused Modeste to forget her present uneasiness. Dumay went down to Havre early in the morning, and soon discovered that no architect had been in town the day before. Furious at Butscha's lie, which revealed a conspiracy of which he was resolved to know the meaning, he rushed from the mayor's office to his friend Latournelle.

"Where's your Master Butscha?" he demanded of the notary, when he saw that the clerk was not in his place.

"Butscha, my dear fellow, has gone to Paris. He heard some news of his father this morning on the quays, from a Swedish sailor. It seems the father went to the Indies and served a prince, or something, and he is now in Paris."

"Lies! it's all a trick! infamous! I'll find that damned cripple if I've got to go express to Paris for him," cried Dumay. "Butscha is deceiving us; he knows something about Modeste, and hasn't told us. If he meddles in this thing he shall never be a notary. I'll roll him in the mud from which he came, I'll—"

"Come, come, my friend; never hang a man before you try him," said Latournelle, frightened at Dumay's rage.

After stating the facts on which his suspicions were founded, Dumay begged Madame Latournelle to go and stay at the Chalet during his absence.

"You will find the colonel in Paris," said the notary. "In the shipping news quoted this morning in the Journal of Commerce, I found under the head of Marseilles—here, see for yourself," he said, offering the paper. "'The Bettina Mignon, Captain Mignon, arrived October 6'; it is now the 17th, and the colonel is sure to be in Paris."

Dumay requested Gobenheim to do without him in future, and then went back to the Chalet, which he reached just as Modeste was sealing her two letters, to her father and Canalis. Except for the address the letters were precisely alike both in weight and appearance. Modeste thought she had laid that to her father over that to her Melchior, but had, in fact, done exactly the reverse. This mistake, so often made in the little things of life, occasioned the discovery of her secret by Dumay and her mother. The former was talking vehemently to

Madame Mignon in the salon, and revealing to her his fresh fears caused by Modeste's duplicity and Butscha's connivance.

"Madame," he cried, "he is a serpent whom we have warmed in our bosoms; there's no place in his contorted little body for a soul!"

Modeste put the letter for her father into the pocket of her apron, supposing it to be that for Canalis, and came downstairs with the letter for her lover in her hand, to see Dumay before he started for Paris.

"What has happened to my Black Dwarf? why are you talking so loud!" she said, appearing at the door.

"Mademoiselle, Butscha has gone to Paris, and you, no doubt, know why,—to carry on that affair of the little architect with the sulphur waistcoat, who, unluckily for the hunchback's lies, has never been here."

Modeste was struck dumb; feeling sure that the dwarf had departed on a mission of inquiry as to her poet's morals, she turned pale, and sat down.

"I'm going after him; I shall find him," continued Dumay. "Is that the letter for your father, mademoiselle?" he added, holding out his hand. "I will take it to the Mongenods. God grant the colonel and I may not pass each other on the road."

Modeste gave him the letter. Dumay looked mechanically at the address.

"'Monsieur le Baron de Canalis, rue de Paradis-Poissoniere, No. 29'!" he cried out; "what does that mean?"

"Ah, my daughter! that is the man you love," exclaimed Madame Mignon; "the stanzas you set to music were his—"

"And that's his portrait that you have in a frame upstairs," added Dumay.

"Give me back that letter, Monsieur Dumay," said Modeste, erecting herself like a lioness defending her cubs.

"There it is, mademoiselle," he replied.

Modeste put it into the bosom of her dress, and gave Dumay the one intended for her father.

"I know what you are capable of, Dumay," she said; "and if you take one step against Monsieur de Canalis, I shall take another out of this house, to which I will never return."

"You will kill your mother, mademoiselle," replied Dumay, who left the room and called his wife.

The poor mother was indeed half-fainting,—struck to the heart by Modeste's

words.

“Good-bye, wife,” said the Breton, kissing the American. “Take care of the mother; I go to save the daughter.”

He made his preparations for the journey in a few minutes, and started for Havre. An hour later he was travelling post to Paris, with the haste that nothing but passion or speculation can get out of wheels.

Recovering herself under Modeste’s tender care, Madame Mignon went up to her bedroom leaning on the arm of her daughter, to whom she said, as her sole reproach, when they were alone:—

“My unfortunate child, see what you have done! Why did you conceal anything from me? Am I so harsh?”

“Oh! I was just going to tell it to you comfortably,” sobbed Modeste.

She thereupon related everything to her mother, read her the letters and their answers, and shed the rose of her poem petal by petal into the heart of the kind German woman. When this confidence, which took half the day, was over, when she saw something that was almost a smile on the lips of the too indulgent mother, Modeste fell upon her breast in tears.

“Oh, mother!” she said amid her sobs, “you, whose heart, all gold and poetry, is a chosen vessel, chosen of God to hold a sacred love, a single and celestial love that endures for life; you, whom I wish to imitate by loving no one but my husband,—you will surely understand what bitter tears I am now shedding. This butterfly, this Psyche of my thoughts, this dual soul which I have nurtured with maternal care, my love, my sacred love, this living mystery of mysteries—it is about to fall into vulgar hands, and they will tear its diaphanous wings and rend its veil under the miserable pretext of enlightening me, of discovering whether genius is as prudent as a banker, whether my Melchior has saved his money, or whether he has some entanglement to shake off; they want to find out if he is guilty to bourgeois eyes of youthful indiscretions,—which to the sun of our love are like the clouds of the dawn. Oh! what will come of it? what will they do? See! feel my hand, it burns with fever. Ah! I shall never survive it.”

And Modeste, really taken with a chill, was forced to go to bed, causing serious uneasiness to her mother, Madame Latournelle, and Madame Dumay, who took good care of her during the journey of the lieutenant to Paris,—to which city the logic of events compels us to transport our drama for a moment.

Truly modest minds, like that of Ernest de La Briere, but especially those who, knowing their own value, also know that they are neither loved nor appreciated, can understand the infinite joy to which the young secretary abandoned himself

on reading Modeste's letter. Could it be that after thinking him lofty and witty in soul, his young, his artless, his tricksome mistress now thought him handsome? This flattery is the flattery supreme. And why? Beauty is, undoubtedly, the signature of the master to the work into which he has put his soul; it is the divine spirit manifested. And to see it where it is not, to create it by the power of an inward look,—is not that the highest reach of love? And so the poor youth cried aloud with all the rapture of an applauded author, "At last I am beloved!" When a woman, be she maid, wife, or widow, lets the charming words escape her, "Thou art handsome," the words may be false, but the man opens his thick skull to their subtle poison, and thenceforth he is attached by an everlasting tie to the pretty flatterer, the true or the deceived judge; she becomes his particular world, he thirsts for her continual testimony, and he never wearies of it, even if he is a crowned prince. Ernest walked proudly up and down his room; he struck a three-quarter, full-face, and profile attitude before the glass; he tried to criticise himself; but a voice, diabolically persuasive, whispered to him, "Modeste is right." He took up her letter and re-read it; he saw his fairest of the fair; he talked with her; then, in the midst of his ecstacy, a dreadful thought came to him:—

"She thinks me Canalis, and she has a million of money!"

Down went his happiness, just as a somnambulist, having attained the peak of a roof, hears a voice, awakes, and falls crushed upon the pavement.

"Without the halo of fame I shall be hideous in her eyes," he cried; "what a maddening situation I have put myself in!"

La Briere was too much the man of his letters which we have read, his heart was too noble and pure to allow him to hesitate at the call of honor. He at once resolved to find Modeste's father, if he were in Paris, and confess all to him, and to let Canalis know the serious results of their Parisian jest. To a sensitive nature like his, Modeste's large fortune was in itself a determining reason. He could not allow it to be even suspected that the ardor of the correspondence, so sincere on his part, had in view the capture of a "dot." Tears were in his eyes as he made his way to the rue Chantereine to find the banker Mongenod, whose fortune and business connections were partly the work of the minister to whom Ernest owed his start in life.

At the hour when La Briere was inquiring about the father of his beloved from the head of the house of Mongenod, and getting information that might be useful to him in his strange position, a scene was taking place in Canalis's study which the ex-lieutenant's hasty departure from Havre may have led the reader to foresee.

Like a true soldier of the imperial school, Dumay, whose Breton blood had boiled all the way to Paris, considered a poet to be a poor stick of a fellow, of no consequence whatever,—a buffoon addicted to choruses, living in a garret, dressed in black clothes that were white at every seam, wearing boots that were occasionally without soles, and linen that was unmentionable, and whose fingers knew more about ink than soap; in short, one who looked always as if he had tumbled from the moon, except when scribbling at a desk, like Butscha. But the seething of the Breton's heart and brain received a violent application of cold water when he entered the courtyard of the pretty house occupied by the poet and saw a groom washing a carriage, and also, through the windows of a handsome dining-room, a valet dressed like a banker, to whom the groom referred him, and who answered, looking the stranger over from head to foot, that Monsieur le baron was not visible. "There is," added the man, "a meeting of the council of state to-day, at which Monsieur le baron is obliged to be present."

"Is this really the house of Monsieur Canalis," said Dumay, "a writer of poetry?"

"Monsieur le baron de Canalis," replied the valet, "is the great poet of whom you speak; but he is also the president of the court of Claims attached to the ministry of foreign affairs."

Dumay, who had come to box the ears of a scribbling nobody, found himself confronted by a high functionary of the state. The salon where he was told to wait offered, as a topic for his meditations, the insignia of the Legion of honor glittering on a black coat which the valet had left upon a chair. Presently his eyes were attracted by the beauty and brilliancy of a silver-gilt cup bearing the words "Given by *Madame*." Then he beheld before him, on a pedestal, a Sevres vase on which was engraved, "The gift of Madame la *Dauphine*."

These mute admonitions brought Dumay to his senses while the valet went to ask his master if he would receive a person who had come from Havre expressly to see him,—a stranger named Dumay.

"What sort of a man?" asked Canalis.

"He is well-dressed, and wears the ribbon of the Legion of honor."

Canalis made a sign of assent, and the valet retreated, and then returned and announced, "Monsieur Dumay."

When he heard himself announced, when he was actually in presence of Canalis, in a study as gorgeous as it was elegant, with his feet on a carpet far handsomer than any in the house of Mignon, and when he met the studied glance of the poet who was playing with the tassels of a sumptuous dressing-gown,

Dumay was so completely taken aback that he allowed the great poet to have the first word.

“To what do I owe the honor of your visit, monsieur?”

“Monsieur,” began Dumay, who remained standing.

“If you have a good deal to say,” interrupted Canalis, “I must ask you to be seated.”

And Canalis himself plunged into an armchair a la Voltaire, crossed his legs, raised the upper one to the level of his eye and looked fixedly at Dumay, who became, to use his own martial slang, “bayonetted.”

“I am listening, monsieur,” said the poet; “my time is precious,—the ministers are expecting me.”

“Monsieur,” said Dumay, “I shall be brief. You have seduced—how, I do not know—a young lady in Havre, young, beautiful, and rich; the last and only hope of two noble families; and I have come to ask your intentions.”

Canalis, who had been busy during the last three months with serious matters of his own, and was trying to get himself made commander of the Legion of honor and minister to a German court, had completely forgotten Modeste’s letter.”

“I!” he exclaimed.

“You!” repeated Dumay.

“Monsieur,” answered Canalis, smiling; “I know no more of what you are talking about than if you had said it in Hebrew. I seduce a young girl! I, who—” and a superb smile crossed his features. “Come, come, monsieur, I’m not such a child as to steal fruit over the hedges when I have orchards and gardens of my own where the finest peaches ripen. All Paris knows where my affections are set. Very likely there may be some young girl in Havre full of enthusiasm for my verses,—of which they are not worthy; that would not surprise me at all; nothing is more common. See! look at that lovely coffer of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and edged with that iron-work as fine as lace. That coffer belonged to Pope Leo X., and was given to me by the Duchesse de Chaulieu, who received it from the king of Spain. I use it to hold the letters I receive from ladies and young girls living in every quarter of Europe. Oh! I assure you I feel the utmost respect for these flowers of the soul, cut and sent in moments of enthusiasm that are worthy of all reverence. Yes, to me the impulse of a heart is a noble and sublime thing! Others—scoffers—light their cigars with such letters, or give them to their wives for curl-papers; but I, who am a bachelor, monsieur, I have too much

delicacy not to preserve these artless offerings—so fresh, so disinterested—in a tabernacle of their own. In fact, I guard them with a species of veneration, and at my death they will be burned before my eyes. People may call that ridiculous, but I do not care. I am grateful; these proofs of devotion enable me to bear the criticisms and annoyances of a literary life. When I receive a shot in the back from some enemy lurking under cover of a daily paper, I look at that casket and think,—here and there in this wide world there are hearts whose wounds have been healed, or soothed, or dressed by me!”

This bit of poetry, declaimed with all the talent of a great actor, petrified the lieutenant, whose eyes opened to their utmost extent, and whose astonishment delighted the poet.

“I will permit you,” continued the peacock, spreading his tail, “out of respect for your position, which I fully appreciate, to open that coffer and look for the letter of your young lady. Though I know I am right, I remember names, and I assure you you are mistaken in thinking—”

“And this is what a poor child comes to in this gulf of Paris!” cried Dumay, —“the darling of her parents, the joy of her friends, the hope of all, petted by all, the pride of a family, who has six persons so devoted to her that they would willingly make a rampart of their lives and fortunes between her and sorrow. Monsieur,” Dumay remarked after a pause, “you are a great poet, and I am only a poor soldier. For fifteen years I served my country in the ranks; I have had the wind of many a bullet in my face; I have crossed Siberia and been a prisoner there; the Russians flung me on a kibitka, and God knows what I suffered. I have seen thousands of my comrades die,—but you, you have given me a chill to the marrow of my bones, such as I never felt before.”

Dumay fancied that his words moved the poet, but in fact they only flattered him,—a thing which at this period of his life had become almost an impossibility; for his ambitious mind had long forgotten the first perfumed phial that praise had broken over his head.

“Ah, my soldier!” he said solemnly, laying his hand on Dumay’s shoulder, and thinking to himself how droll it was to make a soldier of the empire tremble, “this young girl may be all in all to you, but to society at large what is she? nothing. At this moment the greatest mandarin in China may be yielding up the ghost and putting half the universe in mourning, and what is that to you? The English are killing thousands of people in India more worthy than we are; why, at this very moment while I am speaking to you some ravishing woman is being burned alive,—did that make you care less for your cup of coffee this morning at breakfast? Not a day passes in Paris that some mother in rags does not cast her

infant on the world to be picked up by whoever finds it; and yet see! here is this delicious tea in a cup that cost five louis, and I write verses which Parisian women rush to buy, exclaiming, ‘Divine! delicious! charming! food for the soul!’ Social nature, like Nature herself, is a great forgetter. You will be quite surprised ten years hence at what you have done to-day. You are here in a city where people die, where they marry, where they adore each other at an assignation, where young girls suffocate themselves, where the man of genius with his cargo of thoughts teeming with humane beneficence goes to the bottom,—all side by side, sometimes under the same roof, and yet ignorant of each other, ignorant and indifferent. And here you come among us and ask us to expire with grief at this commonplace affair.”

“You call yourself a poet!” cried Dumay, “but don’t you feel what you write?”

“Good heavens! if we endured the joys or the woes we sing we should be as worn out in three months as a pair of old boots,” said the poet, smiling. “But stay, you shall not come from Havre to Paris to see Canalis without carrying something back with you. Warrior!” (Canalis had the form and action of an Homeric hero) “learn this from the poet: Every noble sentiment in man is a poem so exclusively individual that his nearest friend, his other self, cares nothing for it. It is a treasure which is his alone, it is—”

“Forgive me for interrupting you,” said Dumay, who was gazing at the poet with horror, “but did you ever come to Havre?”

“I was there for a day and a night in the spring of 1824 on my way to London.”

“You are a man of honor,” continued Dumay; “will you give me your word that you do not know Mademoiselle Modeste Mignon?”

“This is the first time that name ever struck my ear,” replied Canalis.

“Ah, monsieur!” said Dumay, “into what dark intrigue am I about to plunge? Can I count upon you to help me in my inquiries?—for I am certain that some one has been using your name. You ought to have had a letter yesterday from Havre.”

“I received none. Be sure, monsieur, that I will help you,” said Canalis, “so far as I have the opportunity of doing so.”

Dumay withdrew, his heart torn with anxiety, believing that the wretched Butscha had worn the skin of the poet to deceive Modeste; whereas Butscha himself, keen-witted as a prince seeking revenge, and far cleverer than any paid spy, was ferretting out the life and actions of Canalis, escaping notice by his insignificance, like an insect that bores its way into the sap of a tree.

The Breton had scarcely left the poet's house when La Briere entered his friend's study. Naturally, Canalis told him of the visit of the man from Havre.

"Ha!" said Ernest, "Modeste Mignon; that is just what I have come to speak of."

"Ah, bah!" cried Canalis; "have I had a triumph by proxy?"

"Yes; and here is the key to it. My friend, I am loved by the sweetest girl in all the world,—beautiful enough to shine beside the greatest beauties in Paris, with a heart and mind worthy of Clarissa. She has seen me; I have pleased her, and she thinks me the great Canalis. But that is not all. Modeste Mignon is of high birth, and Mongenod has just told me that her father, the Comte de La Bastie, has something like six millions. The father is here now, and I have asked him through Mongenod for an interview at two o'clock. Mongenod is to give him a hint, just a word, that it concerns the happiness of his daughter. But you will readily understand that before seeing the father I feel I ought to make a clean breast of it to you."

"Among the plants whose flowers bloom in the sunshine of fame," said Canalis, impressively, "there is one, and the most magnificent, which bears like the orange-tree a golden fruit amid the mingled perfumes of beauty and of mind; a lovely plant, a true tenderness, a perfect bliss, and—it eludes me." Canalis looked at the carpet that Ernest might not read his eyes. "Could I," he continued after a pause to regain his self-possession, "how could I have divined that flower from a pretty sheet of perfumed paper, that true heart, that young girl, that woman in whom love wears the livery of flattery, who loves us for ourselves, who offers us felicity? It needed but an angel or a demon to perceive her; and what am I but the ambitious head of a Court of Claims! Ah, my friend, fame makes us the target of a thousand arrows. One of us owes his rich marriage to an hydraulic piece of poetry, while I, more seductive, more a woman's man than he, have missed mine,—for, do you love her, poor girl?" he said, looking up at La Briere.

"Oh!" ejaculated the young man.

"Well then," said the poet, taking his secretary's arm and leaning heavily upon it, "be happy, Ernest. By a mere accident I have been not ungrateful to you. You are richly rewarded for your devotion, and I will generously further your happiness."

Canalis was furious; but he could not behave otherwise than with propriety, and he made the best of his disappointment by mounting it as a pedestal.

"Ah, Canalis, I have never really known you till this moment."

“Did you expect to? It takes some time to go round the world,” replied the poet with his pompous irony.

“But think,” said La Briere, “of this enormous fortune.”

“Ah, my friend, is it not well invested in you?” cried Canalis, accompanying the words with a charming gesture.

“Melchior,” said La Briere, “I am yours for life and death.”

He wrung the poet’s hand and left him abruptly, for he was in haste to meet Monsieur Mignon.

CHAPTER XV. A FATHER STEPS IN

The Comte de La Bastie was at this moment overwhelmed with the sorrows which lay in wait for him as their prey. He had learned from his daughter's letter of Bettina's death and of his wife's infirmity, and Dumay related to him, when they met, his terrible perplexity as to Modeste's love affairs.

"Leave me to myself," he said to his faithful friend.

As the lieutenant closed the door, the unhappy father threw himself on a sofa, with his head in his hands, weeping those slow, scanty tears which suffuse the eyes of a man of sixty, but do not fall,—tears soon dried, yet quick to start again, —the last dews of the human autumn.

"To have children, to have a wife, to adore them—what is it but to have many hearts and bare them to a dagger?" he cried, springing up with the bound of a tiger and walking up and down the room. "To be a father is to give one's self over, bound hand and foot to sorrow. If I meet that D'Estourny I will kill him. To have daughters!—one gives her life to a scoundrel, the other, my Modeste, falls a victim to whom? a coward, who deceives her with the gilded paper of a poet. If it were Canalis himself it might not be so bad; but that Scapin of a lover!—I will strangle him with my two hands," he cried, making an involuntary gesture of furious determination. "And what then? suppose my Modeste were to die of grief?"

He gazed mechanically out of the windows of the hotel des Princes, and then returned to the sofa, where he sat motionless. The fatigues of six voyages to India, the anxieties of speculation, the dangers he had encountered and evaded, and his many griefs, had silvered Charles Mignon's head. His handsome soldierly face, so pure in outline and now bronzed by the suns of China and the southern seas, had acquired an air of dignity which his present grief rendered almost sublime.

"Mongenod told me he felt confidence in the young man who is coming to ask me for my daughter," he thought at last; and at this moment Ernest de La Briere was announced by one of the servants whom Monsieur de La Bastie had attached to himself during the last four years.

"You have come, monsieur, from my friend Mongenod?" he said.

"Yes," replied Ernest, growing timid when he saw before him a face as

sombre as Othello's. "My name is Ernest de La Briere, related to the family of the late cabinet minister, and his private secretary during his term of office. On his dismissal, his Excellency put me in the Court of Claims, to which I am legal counsel, and where I may possibly succeed as chief—"

"And how does all this concern Mademoiselle de La Bastie?" asked the count.

"Monsieur, I love her; and I have the unhoped-for happiness of being loved by her. Hear me, monsieur," cried Ernest, checking a violent movement on the part of the angry father. "I have the strangest confession to make to you, a shameful one for a man of honor; but the worst punishment of my conduct, natural enough in itself, is not the telling of it to you; no, I fear the daughter even more than the father."

Ernest then related simply, and with the nobleness that comes of sincerity, all the facts of his little drama, not omitting the twenty or more letters, which he had brought with him, nor the interview which he had just had with Canalis. When Monsieur Mignon had finished reading the letters, the unfortunate lover, pale and suppliant, actually trembled under the fiery glance of the Provencal.

"Monsieur," said the latter, "in this whole matter there is but one error, but that is cardinal. My daughter will not have six millions; at the utmost, she will have a marriage portion of two hundred thousand francs, and very doubtful expectations."

"Ah, monsieur!" cried Ernest, rising and grasping Monsieur Mignon's hand; "you take a load from my breast. Nothing can now hinder my happiness. I have friends, influence; I shall certainly be chief of the Court of Claims. Had Mademoiselle Mignon no more than ten thousand francs, if I had even to make a settlement on her, she should still be my wife; and to make her happy as you, monsieur, have made your wife happy, to be to you a real son (for I have no father), are the deepest desires of my heart."

Charles Mignon stepped back three paces and fixed upon La Briere a look which entered the eyes of the young man as a dagger enters its sheath; he stood silent a moment, recognizing the absolute candor, the pure truthfulness of that open nature in the light of the young man's inspired eyes. "Is fate at last weary of pursuing me?" he asked himself. "Am I to find in this young man the pearl of sons-in-law?" He walked up and down the room in strong agitation.

"Monsieur," he said at last, "you are bound to submit wholly to the judgment which you have come here to seek, otherwise you are now playing a farce."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Listen to me," said the father, nailing La Briere where he stood with a glance.

“I shall be neither harsh, nor hard, nor unjust. You shall have the advantages and the disadvantages of the false position in which you have placed yourself. My daughter believes that she loves one of the great poets of the day, whose fame is really that which has attracted her. Well, I, her father, intend to give her the opportunity to choose between the celebrity which has been a beacon to her, and the poor reality which the irony of fate has flung at her feet. Ought she not to choose between Canalis and yourself? I rely upon your honor not to repeat what I have told you as to the state of my affairs. You may each come, I mean you and your friend the Baron de Canalis, to Havre for the last two weeks of October. My house will be open to both of you, and my daughter must have an opportunity to study you. You must yourself bring your rival, and not disabuse him as to the foolish tales he will hear about the wealth of the Comte de La Bastie. I go to Havre to-morrow, and I shall expect you three days later. Adieu, monsieur.”

Poor La Briere went back to Canalis with a dragging step. The poet, meantime, left to himself, had given way to a current of thought out of which had come that secondary impulse which Monsieur de Talleyrand valued so much. The first impulse is the voice of nature, the second that of society.

“A girl worth six millions,” he thought to himself, “and my eyes were not able to see that gold shining in the darkness! With such a fortune I could be peer of France, count, marquis, ambassador. I’ve replied to middle-class women and silly women, and crafty creatures who wanted autographs; I’ve tired myself to death with masked-ball intrigues,—at the very moment when God was sending me a soul of price, an angel with golden wings! Bah! I’ll make a poem on it, and perhaps the chance will come again. Heavens! the luck of that little La Briere,—strutting about in my lustre—plagiarism! I’m the cast and he’s to be the statue, is he? It is the old fable of Bertrand and Raton. Six millions, a beauty, a Mignon de La Bastie, an aristocratic divinity loving poetry and the poet! And I, who showed my muscle as man of the world, who did those Alcide exercises to silence by moral force the champion of physical force, that old soldier with a heart, that friend of this very young girl, whom he’ll now go and tell that I have a heart of iron!—I, to play Napoleon when I ought to have been seraphic! Good heavens! True, I shall have my friend. Friendship is a beautiful thing. I have kept him, but at what a price! Six millions, that’s the cost of it; we can’t have many friends if we pay all that for them.”

La Briere entered the room as Canalis reached this point in his meditations. He was gloom personified.

“Well, what’s the matter?” said Canalis.

“The father exacts that his daughter shall choose between the two Canalis—”

“Poor boy!” cried the poet, laughing, “he’s a clever fellow, that father.”

“I have pledged my honor that I will take you to Havre,” said La Briere, piteously.

“My dear fellow,” said Canalis, “if it is a question of your honor you may count on me. I’ll ask for leave of absence for a month.”

“Modeste is so beautiful!” exclaimed La Briere, in a despairing tone. “You will crush me out of sight. I wondered all along that fate should be so kind to me; I knew it was all a mistake.”

“Bah! we will see about that,” said Canalis with inhuman gaiety.

That evening, after dinner, Charles Mignon and Dumay, were flying, by virtue of three francs to each postilion, from Paris to Havre. The father had eased the watch-dog’s mind as to Modeste and her love affairs; the guard was relieved, and Butscha’s innocence established.

“It is all for the best, my old Dumay,” said the count, who had been making certain inquiries of Mongenod respecting Canalis and La Briere. “We are going to have two actors for one part!” he cried gaily.

Nevertheless, he requested his old comrade to be absolutely silent about the comedy which was now to be played at the Chalet,—a comedy it might be, but also a gentle punishment, or, if you prefer it, a lesson given by the father to the daughter.

The two friends kept up a long conversation all the way from Paris to Havre, which put the colonel in possession of the facts relating to his family during the past four years, and informing Dumay that Desplein, the great surgeon, was coming to Havre at the end of the present month to examine the cataract on Madame Mignon’s eyes, and decide if it were possible to restore her sight.

A few moments before the breakfast-hour at the Chalet, the clacking of a postilion’s whip apprised the family that the two soldiers were arriving; only a father’s joy at returning after long absence could be heralded with such clatter, and it brought all the women to the garden gate. There is many a father and many a child—perhaps more fathers than children—who will understand the delights of such an arrival, and that happy fact shows that literature has no need to depict it. Perhaps all gentle and tender emotions are beyond the range of literature.

Not a word that could trouble the peace of the family was uttered on this joyful day. Truce was tacitly established between father, mother, and child as to the so-called mysterious love which had paled Modeste’s cheeks,—for this was

the first day she had left her bed since Dumay's departure for Paris. The colonel, with the charming delicacy of a true soldier, never left his wife's side nor released her hand; but he watched Modeste with delight, and was never weary of noting her refined, elegant, and poetic beauty. Is it not by such seeming trifles that we recognize a man of feeling? Modeste, who feared to interrupt the subdued joy of the husband and wife kept at a little distance, coming from time to time to kiss her father's forehead, and when she kissed it overmuch she seemed to mean that she was kissing it for two,—for Bettina and herself.

"Oh, my darling, I understand you," said the colonel, pressing her hand as she assailed him with kisses.

"Hush!" whispered the young girl, glancing at her mother.

Dumay's rather sly and pregnant silence made Modeste somewhat uneasy as to the upshot of his journey to Paris. She looked at him furtively every now and then, without being able to get beneath his epidermis. The colonel, like a prudent father, wanted to study the character of his only daughter, and above all consult his wife, before entering on a conference upon which the happiness of the whole family depended.

"To-morrow, my precious child," he said as they parted for the night, "get up early, and we will go and take a walk on the seashore. We have to talk about your poems, Mademoiselle de La Bastie."

His last words, accompanied by a smile, which reappeared like an echo on Dumay's lips, were all that gave Modeste any clew to what was coming; but it was enough to calm her uneasiness and keep her awake far into the night with her head full of suppositions; this, however, did not prevent her from being dressed and ready in the morning long before the colonel.

"You know all, my kind papa?" she said as soon as they were on the road to the beach.

"I know all, and a good deal more than you do," he replied.

After that remark father and daughter went some little way in silence.

"Explain to me, my child, how it happens that a girl whom her mother idolizes could have taken such an important step as to write to a stranger without consulting her."

"Oh, papa! because mamma would never have allowed it."

"And do you think, my daughter, that that was proper? Though you have been educating your mind in this fatal way, how is it that your good sense and your intellect did not, in default of modesty, step in and show you that by acting as

you did you were throwing yourself at a man's head. To think that my daughter, my only remaining child, should lack pride and delicacy! Oh, Modeste, you made your father pass two hours in hell when he heard of it; for, after all, your conduct has been the same as Bettina's without the excuse of a heart's seduction; you were a coquette in cold blood, and that sort of coquetry is head-love, the worst vice of French women."

"I, without pride!" said Modeste, weeping; "but *he* has not yet seen me."

"*He* knows your name."

"I did not tell it to him till my eyes had vindicated the correspondence, lasting three months, during which our souls had spoken to each other."

"Oh, my dear misguided angel, you have mixed up a species of reason with a folly that has compromised your own happiness and that of your family."

"But, after all, papa, happiness is the absolution of my temerity," she said, pouting.

"Oh! your conduct is temerity, is it?"

"A temerity that my mother practised before me," she retorted quickly.

"Rebellious child! your mother after seeing me at a ball told her father, who adored her, that she thought she could be happy with me. Be honest, Modeste; is there any likeness between a love hastily conceived, I admit, but under the eyes of a father, and your mad action of writing to a stranger?"

"A stranger, papa? say rather one of our greatest poets, whose character and whose life are exposed to the strongest light of day, to detraction, to calumny,—a man robed in fame, and to whom, my dear father, I was a mere literary and dramatic personage, one of Shakespeare's women, until the moment when I wished to know if the man himself were as beautiful as his soul."

"Good God! my poor child, you are turning marriage into poetry. But if, from time immemorial, girls have been cloistered in the bosom of their families, if God, if social laws put them under the stern yoke of parental sanction, it is, mark my words, to spare them the misfortunes that this very poetry which charms and dazzles you, and which you are therefore unable to judge of, would entail upon them. Poetry is indeed one of the pleasures of life, but it is not life itself."

"Papa, that is a suit still pending before the Court of Facts; the struggle is forever going on between our hearts and the claims of family."

"Alas for the child that finds her happiness in resisting them," said the colonel, gravely. "In 1813 I saw one of my comrades, the Marquis d'Aiglemont, marry his cousin against the wishes of her father, and the pair have since paid

dear for the obstinacy which the young girl took for love. The family must be sovereign in marriage."

"My poet has told me all that," she answered. "He played Orgon for some time; and he was brave enough to disparage the personal lives of poets."

"I have read your letters," said Charles Mignon, with the flicker of a malicious smile on his lips that made Modeste very uneasy, "and I ought to remark that your last epistle was scarcely permissible in any woman, even a Julie d'Etanges. Good God! what harm novels do!"

"We should live them, my dear father, whether people wrote them or not; I think it is better to read them. There are not so many adventures in these days as there were under Louis XIV. and Louis XV., and so they publish fewer novels. Besides, if you have read those letters, you must know that I have chosen the most angelic soul, the most sternly upright man for your son-in-law, and you must have seen that we love one another at least as much as you and mamma love each other. Well, I admit that it was not all exactly conventional; I did, if you *will* have me say so, wrong—"

"I have read your letters," said her father, interrupting her, "and I know exactly how far your lover justified you in your own eyes for a proceeding which might be permissible in some woman who understood life, and who was led away by strong passion, but which in a young girl of twenty was a monstrous piece of wrong-doing."

"Yes, wrong-doing for commonplace people, for the narrow-minded Gobenheims, who measure life with a square rule. Please let us keep to the artistic and poetic life, papa. We young girls have only two ways to act; we must let a man know we love him by mincing and simpering, or we must go to him frankly. Isn't the last way grand and noble? We French girls are delivered over by our families like so much merchandise, at sixty days' sight, sometimes thirty, like Mademoiselle Vilquin; but in England, and Switzerland, and Germany, they follow very much the plan I have adopted. Now what have you got to say to that? Am I not half German?"

"Child!" cried the colonel, looking at her; "the supremacy of France comes from her sound common-sense, from the logic to which her noble language constrains her mind. France is the reason of the whole world. England and Germany are romantic in their marriage customs,—though even there noble families follow our customs. You certainly do not mean to deny that your parents, who know life, who are responsible for your soul and for your happiness, have no right to guard you from the stumbling-blocks that are in your

way? Good heavens!” he continued, speaking half to himself, “is it their fault, or is it ours? Ought we to hold our children under an iron yoke? Must we be punished for the tenderness that leads us to make them happy, and teaches our hearts how to do so?”

Modeste watched her father out of the corner of her eye as she listened to this species of invocation, uttered in a broken voice.

“Was it wrong,” she said, “in a girl whose heart was free, to choose for her husband not only a charming companion, but a man of noble genius, born to an honorable position, a gentleman; the equal of myself, a gentlewoman?”

“You love him?” asked her father.

“Father!” she said, laying her head upon his breast, “would you see me die?”

“Enough!” said the old soldier. “I see your love is inextinguishable.”

“Yes, inextinguishable.”

“Can nothing change it?”

“Nothing.”

“No circumstances, no treachery, no betrayal? You mean that you will love him in spite of everything, because of his personal attractions? Even though he proved a D’Estourny, would you love him still?”

“Oh, my father! you do not know your daughter. Could I love a coward, a man without honor, without faith?”

“But suppose he had deceived you?”

“He? that honest, candid soul, half melancholy? You are joking, father, or else you have never met him.”

“But you see now that your love is not inextinguishable, as you chose to call it. I have already made you admit that circumstances could alter your poem; don’t you now see that fathers are good for something?”

“You want to give me a lecture, papa; it is positively l’Ami des Enfants over again.”

“Poor deceived girl,” said her father, sternly; “it is no lecture of mine, I count for nothing in it; indeed, I am only trying to soften the blow.”

“Father, don’t play tricks with my life,” exclaimed Modeste, turning pale.

“Then, my daughter, summon all your courage. It is you who have been playing tricks with your life, and life is now tricking you.”

Modeste looked at her father in stupid amazement.

“Suppose that young man whom you love, whom you saw four days ago at

church in Havre, was a deceiver?”

“Never!” she cried; “that noble head, that pale face full of poetry—”

“—was a lie,” said the colonel interrupting her. “He was no more Monsieur de Canalis than I am that sailor over there putting out to sea.”

“Do you know what you are killing in me?” she said in a low voice.

“Comfort yourself, my child; though accident has put the punishment of your fault into the fault itself, the harm done is not irreparable. The young man whom you have seen, and with whom you exchanged hearts by correspondence, is a loyal and honorable fellow; he came to me and confided everything. He loves you, and I have no objection to him as a son-in-law.”

“If he is not Canalis, who is he then?” said Modeste in a changed voice.

“The secretary; his name is Ernest de La Briere. He is not a nobleman; but he is one of those plain men with fixed principles and sound morality who satisfy parents. However, that is not the point; you have seen him and nothing can change your heart; you have chosen him, comprehend his soul, it is as beautiful as he himself.”

The count was interrupted by a heavy sigh from Modeste. The poor girl sat with her eyes fixed on the sea, pale and rigid as death, as if a pistol shot had struck her in those fatal words, *a plain man, with fixed principles and sound morality*.

“Deceived!” she said at last.

“Like your poor sister, but less fatally.”

“Let us go home, father,” she said, rising from the hillock on which they were sitting. “Papa, hear me, I swear before God to obey your wishes, whatever they may be, in the *affair* of my marriage.”

“Then you don’t love him any longer?” asked her father.

“I loved an honest man, with no falsehood on his face, upright as yourself, incapable of disguising himself like an actor, with the paint of another man’s glory on his cheeks.”

“You said nothing could change you”; remarked the colonel, ironically.

“Ah, do not trifle with me!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands and looking at her father in distressful anxiety; “don’t you see that you are wringing my heart and destroying my beliefs with your jokes.”

“God forbid! I have told you the exact truth.”

“You are very kind, father,” she said after a pause, and with a sort of

solemnity.

“He has kept your letters,” resumed the colonel; “now suppose the rash caresses of your soul had fallen into the hands of one of those poets who, as Dumay says, light their cigars with them?”

“Oh!—you are going too far.”

“Canalis told him so.”

“Has Dumay seen Canalis?”

“Yes,” answered her father.

The two walked along in silence.

“So that is why that *gentleman*,” resumed Modeste, “told me so much harm of poets and poetry; no wonder the little secretary said—Why,” she added, interrupting herself, “his virtues, his noble qualities, his fine sentiments are nothing but an epistolary theft! The man who steals glory and a name may very likely—”

“—break locks, steal purses, and cut people’s throats on the highway,” cried the colonel. “Ah, you young girls, that’s just like you,—with your peremptory opinions and your ignorance of life. A man who once deceives a woman was born under the scaffold on which he ought to die.”

This ridicule stopped Modeste’s effervescence for a moment and least, and again there was silence.

“My child,” said the colonel, presently, “men in society, as in nature everywhere, are made to win the hearts of women, and women must defend themselves. You have chosen to invert the parts. Was that wise? Everything is false in a false position. The first wrong-doing was yours. No, a man is not a monster because he seeks to please a woman; it is our right to win her by aggression with all its consequences, short of crime and cowardice. A man may have many virtues even if he does deceive a woman; if he deceives her, it is because he finds her wanting in some of the treasures that he sought in her. None but a queen, an actress, or a woman placed so far above a man that she seems to him a queen, can go to him of herself without incurring blame—and for a young girl to do it! Why, she is false to all that God has given her that is sacred and lovely and noble,—no matter with what grace or what poetry or what precautions she surrounds her fault.”

“To seek the master and find the servant!” she said bitterly, “oh! I can never recover from it!”

“Nonsense! Monsieur Ernest de La Briere is, to my thinking, fully the equal of

the Baron de Canalis. He was private secretary of a cabinet minister, and he is now counsel for the Court of Claims; he has a heart, and he adores you, but—he *does not write verses*. No, I admit, he is not a poet; but for all that he may have a heart full of poetry. At any rate, my dear girl," added her father, as Modeste made a gesture of disgust, "you are to see both of them, the sham and the true Canalis—"

"Oh, papa!—"

"Did you not swear just now to obey me in everything, even in the *affair* of your marriage? Well, I allow you to choose which of the two you like best for a husband. You have begun by a poem, you shall finish with a bucolic, and try if you can discover the real character of these gentlemen here, in the country, on a few hunting or fishing excursions."

Modeste bowed her head and walked home with her father, listening to what he said but replying only in monosyllables.

CHAPTER XVI. DISENCHANTED

The poor girl had fallen humiliated from the alp she had scaled in search of her eagle's nest, into the mud of the swamp below, where (to use the poetic language of an author of our day) "after feeling the soles of her feet too tender to tread the broken glass of reality, Imagination—which in that delicate bosom united the whole of womanhood, from the violet-hidden reveries of a chaste young girl to the passionate desires of the sex—had led her into enchanted gardens where, oh, bitter sight! she now saw, springing from the ground, not the sublime flower of her fancy, but the hairy, twisted limbs of the black mandragora." Modeste suddenly found herself brought down from the mystic heights of her love to a straight, flat road bordered with ditches,—in short the work-day path of common life. What ardent, aspiring soul would not have been bruised and broken by such a fall? Whose feet were these at which she had shed her thoughts? The Modeste who re-entered the Chalet was no more the Modeste who had left it two hours earlier than an actress in the street is like an actress on the boards. She fell into a state of numb depression that was pitiful to see. The sun was darkened, nature veiled itself, even the flowers no longer spoke to her. Like all young girls with a tendency to extremes, she drank too deeply of the cup of disillusion. She fought against reality, and would not bend her neck to the yoke of family and conventions; it was, she felt, too heavy, too hard, too crushing. She would not listen to the consolations of her father and mother, and tasted a sort of savage pleasure in letting her soul suffer to the utmost.

"Poor Butscha was right," she said one evening.

The words indicate the distance she travelled in a short space of time and in gloomy sadness across the barren plain of reality. Sadness, when caused by the overgrowth of hope, is a disease,—sometimes a fatal one. It would be no mean object for physiology to search out in what ways and by what means Thought produces the same internal disorganization as poison; and how it is that despair affects the appetite, destroys the pylorus, and changes all the physical conditions of the strongest life. Such was the case with Modeste. In three short days she became the image of morbid melancholy; she did not sing, she could not be made to smile. Charles Mignon, becoming uneasy at the non-arrival of the two friends, thought of going to fetch them, when, on the evening of the fifth day, he received news of their movements through Latournelle.

Canalis, excessively delighted at the idea of a rich marriage, was determined to neglect nothing that might help him to cut out La Briere, without, however, giving La Briere a chance to reproach him for having violated the laws of friendship. The poet felt that nothing would lower a lover so much in the eyes of a young girl as to exhibit him in a subordinate position; and he therefore proposed to La Briere, in the most natural manner, to take a little country-house at Ingouville for a month, and live there together on pretence of requiring sea-air. As soon as La Briere, who at first saw nothing amiss in the proposal, had consented, Canalis declared that he should pay all expenses, and he sent his valet to Havre, telling him to see Monsieur Latournelle and get his assistance in choosing the house,—well aware that the notary would repeat all particulars to the Mignons. Ernest and Canalis had, as may well be supposed, talked over all the aspects of the affair, and the rather prolix Ernest had given a good many useful hints to his rival. The valet, understanding his master’s wishes, fulfilled them to the letter; he trumpeted the arrival of the great poet, for whom the doctors advised sea-air to restore his health, injured as it was by the double toils of literature and politics. This important personage wanted a house, which must have at least such and such a number of rooms, as he would bring with him a secretary, cook, two servants, and a coachman, not counting himself, Germain Bonnet, the valet. The carriage, selected and hired for a month by Canalis, was a pretty one; and Germain set about finding a pair of fine horses which would also answer as saddle-horses,—for, as he said, monsieur le baron and his secretary took horseback exercise. Under the eyes of little Latournelle, who went with him to various houses, Germain made a good deal of talk about the secretary, rejecting two or three because there was no suitable room for Monsieur de La Briere.

“Monsieur le baron,” he said to the notary, “makes his secretary quite his best friend. Ah! I should be well scolded if Monsieur de La Briere was not as well treated as monsieur le baron himself; and after all, you know, Monsieur de La Briere is a lawyer in my master’s court.”

Germain never appeared in public unless punctiliously dressed in black, with spotless gloves, well-polished boots, and otherwise as well apparelled as a lawyer. Imagine the effect he produced in Havre, and the idea people took of the great poet from this sample of him! The valet of a man of wit and intellect ends by getting a little wit and intellect himself which has rubbed off from his master. Germain did not overplay his part; he was simple and good-humored, as Canalis had instructed him to be. Poor La Briere was in blissful ignorance of the harm Germain was doing to his prospects, and the depreciation his consent to the

arrangement had brought upon him; it is, however, true that some inkling of the state of things rose to Modeste's ears from these lower regions.

Canalis had arranged to bring his secretary in his own carriage, and Ernest's unsuspicious nature did not perceive that he was putting himself in a false position until too late to remedy it. The delay in the arrival of the pair which had troubled Charles Mignon was caused by the painting of the Canalis arms on the panels of the carriage, and by certain orders given to a tailor; for the poet neglected none of the innumerable details which might, even the smallest of them, influence a young girl.

"It is all right," said Latournelle to Mignon on the sixth day. "The baron's valet has hired Madame Amaury's villa at Sanvic, all furnished, for seven hundred francs; he has written to his master that he may start, and that all will be ready on his arrival. So the two gentlemen will be here Sunday. I have also had a letter from Butscha; here it is; it's not long: 'My dear master,—I cannot get back till Sunday. Between now and then I have some very important inquiries to make which concern the happiness of a person in whom you take an interest.'"

The announcement of this arrival did not rouse Modeste from her gloom; the sense of her fall and the bewilderment of her mind were still too great, and she was not nearly as much of a coquette as her father thought her to be. There is, in truth, a charming and permissible coquetry, that of the soul, which may claim to be love's politeness. Charles Mignon, when scolding his daughter, failed to distinguish between the mere desire of pleasing and the love of the mind,—the thirst for love, and the thirst for admiration. Like every true colonel of the Empire he saw in this correspondence, rapidly read, only the young girl who had thrown herself at the head of a poet; but in the letters which we were forced to lack of space to suppress, a better judge would have admired the dignified and gracious reserve which Modeste had substituted for the rather aggressive and light-minded tone of her first letters. The father, however, was only too cruelly right on one point. Modeste's last letter, which we have read, had indeed spoken as though the marriage were a settled fact, and the remembrance of that letter filled her with shame; she thought her father very harsh and cruel to force her to receive a man unworthy of her, yet to whom her soul had flown, as it were, bare. She questioned Dumay about his interview with the poet, she inveigled him into relating its every detail, and she did not think Canalis as barbarous as the lieutenant had declared him. The thought of the beautiful casket which held the letters of the thousand and one women of this literary Don Juan made her smile, and she was strongly tempted to say to her father: "I am not the only one to write to him; the elite of my sex send their leaves for the laurel wreath of the poet."

During this week Modeste's character underwent a transformation. The catastrophe—and it was a great one to her poetic nature—roused a faculty of discernment and also the malice latent in her girlish heart, in which her suitors were about to encounter a formidable adversary. It is a fact that when a young woman's heart is chilled her head becomes clear; she observes with great rapidity of judgment, and with a tinge of pleasantry which Shakespeare's Beatrice so admirably represents in "Much Ado about Nothing." Modeste was seized with a deep disgust for men, now that the most distinguished among them had betrayed her hopes. When a woman loves, what she takes for disgust is simply the ability to see clearly; but in matters of sentiment she is never, especially if she is a young girl, in a condition to see clearly. If she cannot admire, she despises. And so, after passing through terrible struggles of the soul, Modeste necessarily put on the armor on which, as she had once declared, the word "Disdain" was engraved. After reaching that point she was able, in the character of uninterested spectator, to take part in what she was pleased to call the "farce of the suitors," a performance in which she herself was about to play the role of heroine. She particularly set before her mind the satisfaction of humiliating Monsieur de La Briere.

"Modeste is saved," said Madame Mignon to her husband; "she wants to revenge herself on the false Canalis by trying to love the real one."

Such in truth was Modeste's plan. It was so utterly commonplace that her mother, to whom she confided her griefs, advised her on the contrary to treat Monsieur de La Briere with extreme politeness.

CHAPTER XVII. A THIRD SUITOR

“Those two young men,” said Madame Latournelle, on the Saturday evening, “have no idea how many spies they have on their tracks. We are eight in all, on the watch.”

“Don’t say two young men, wife; say three!” cried little Latournelle, looking round him. “Gobenheim is not here, so I can speak out.”

Modeste raised her head, and everybody, imitating Modeste, raised theirs and looked at the notary.

“Yes, a third lover—and he is something like a lover—offers himself as a candidate.”

“Bah!” exclaimed the colonel.

“I speak of no less a person,” said Latournelle, pompously, “than Monsieur le Duc d’Herouville, Marquis de Saint-Sever, Duc de Nivron, Comte de Bayeux, Vicomte d’Essigny, grand equerry and peer of France, knight of the Spur and the Golden Fleece, grandee of Spain, and son of the last governor of Normandy. He saw Mademoiselle Modeste at the time when he was staying with the Vilquins, and he regretted then—as his notary, who came from Bayeux yesterday, tells me—that she was not rich enough for him; for his father recovered nothing but the estate of Herouville on his return to France, and that is saddled with a sister. The young duke is thirty-three years old. I am definitively charged to lay these proposals before you, Monsieur le comte,” added the notary, turning respectfully to the colonel.

“Ask Modeste if she wants another bird in her cage,” replied the count; “as far as I am concerned, I am willing that my lord the grand equerry shall pay her attention.”

Notwithstanding the care with which Charles Mignon avoided seeing people, and though he stayed in the Chalet and never went out without Modeste, Gobenheim had reported Dumay’s wealth; for Dumay had said to him when giving up his position as cashier: “I am to be bailiff for my colonel, and all my fortune, except what my wife needs, is to go to the children of our little Modeste.” Every one in Havre had therefore propounded the same question that the notary had already put to himself: “If Dumay’s share in the profits is six hundred thousand francs, and he is going to be Monsieur Mignon’s bailiff, then

Monsieur Mignon must certainly have a colossal fortune. He arrived at Marseilles on a ship of his own, loaded with indigo; and they say at the Bourse that the cargo, not counting the ship, is worth more than he gives out as his whole fortune."

The colonel was unwilling to dismiss the servants he had brought back with him, whom he had chosen with care during his travels; and he therefore hired a house for them in the lower part of Ingouville, where he installed his valet, cook, and coachman, all Negroes, and three mulattos on whose fidelity he could rely. The coachman was told to search for saddle-horses for Mademoiselle and for his master, and for carriage-horses for the caleche in which the colonel and the lieutenant had returned to Havre. That carriage, bought in Paris, was of the latest fashion, and bore the arms of La Bastie, surmounted by a count's coronet. These things, insignificant in the eyes of a man who for four years had been accustomed to the unbridled luxury of the Indies and of the English merchants at Canton, were the subject of much comment among the business men of Havre and the inhabitants of Ingouville and Graville. Before five days had elapsed the rumor of them ran from one end of Normandy to the other like a train of gunpowder touched by fire.

"Monsieur Mignon has come back from China with millions," some one said in Rouen; "and it seems he was made a count in mid-ocean."

"But he was the Comte de La Bastie before the Revolution," answered another.

"So they call him a liberal just because he was plain Charles Mignon for twenty-five years! What are we coming to?" said a third.

Modeste was considered, therefore, notwithstanding the silence of her parents and friends, as the richest heiress in Normandy, and all eyes began once more to see her merits. The aunt and sister of the Duc d'Herouville confirmed in the aristocratic salons of Bayeux Monsieur Charles Mignon's right to the title and arms of count, derived from Cardinal Mignon, for whom the Cardinal's hat and tassels were added as a crest. They had seen Mademoiselle de La Bastie when they were staying at the Vilquins, and their solicitude for the impoverished head of their house now became active.

"If Mademoiselle de La Bastie is really as rich as she is beautiful," said the aunt of the young duke, "she is the best match in the province. *She* at least is noble."

The last words were aimed at the Vilquins, with whom they had not been able to come to terms, after incurring the humiliation of staying in that bourgeois

household.

Such were the little events which, contrary to the rules of Aristotle and of Horace, precede the introduction of another person into our story; but the portrait and the biography of this personage, this late arrival, shall not be long, taking into consideration his own diminutiveness. The grand equerry shall not take more space here than he will take in history. Monsieur le Duc d'Herouville, offspring of the matrimonial autumn of the last governor of Normandy, was born during the emigration in 1799, at Vienna. The old marechal, father of the present duke, returned with the king in 1814, and died in 1819, before he was able to marry his son. He could only leave him the vast chateau of Herouville, the park, a few dependencies, and a farm which he had bought back with some difficulty; all of which returned a rental of about fifteen thousand francs a year. Louis XVIII. gave the post of grand equerry to the son, who, under Charles X., received the usual pension of twelve thousand francs which was granted to the pauper peers of France. But what were these twenty-seven thousand francs a year and the salary of grand equerry to such a family? In Paris, of course, the young duke used the king's coaches, and had a mansion provided for him in the rue Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre, near the royal stables; his salary paid for his winters in the city, and his twenty-seven thousand francs for the summers in Normandy. If this noble personage was still a bachelor he was less to blame than his aunt, who was not versed in La Fontaine's fables. Mademoiselle d'Herouville made enormous pretensions wholly out of keeping with the spirit of the times; for great names, without the money to keep them up, can seldom win rich heiresses among the higher French nobility, who are themselves embarrassed to provide for their sons under the new law of the equal division of property. To marry the young Duc d'Herouville, it was necessary to conciliate the great banking-houses; but the haughty pride of the daughter of the house alienated these people by cutting speeches. During the first years of the Restoration, from 1817 to 1825, Mademoiselle d'Herouville, though in quest of millions, refused, among others, the daughter of Mongenod the banker, with whom Monsieur de Fontaine afterwards contented himself.

At last, having lost several good opportunities to establish her nephew, entirely through her own fault, she was just considering whether the property of the Nucingens was not too basely acquired, or whether she should lend herself to the ambition of Madame de Nucingen, who wished to make her daughter a duchess. The king, anxious to restore the d'Herouvilles to their former splendor, had almost brought about this marriage, and when it failed he openly accused Mademoiselle d'Herouville of folly. In this way the aunt made the nephew

ridiculous, and the nephew, in his own way, was not less absurd. When great things disappear they leave crumbs, “frusteaux,” Rabelais would say, behind them; and the French nobility of this century has left us too many such fragments. Neither the clergy nor the nobility have anything to complain of in this long history of manners and customs. Those great and magnificent social necessities have been well represented; but we ought surely to renounce the noble title of historian if we are not impartial, if we do not here depict the present degeneracy of the race of nobles, although we have already done so elsewhere,—in the character of the Comte de Mortsauf (in “The Lily of the Valley”), in the “Duchesse de Langeais,” and the very nobleness of the nobility in the “Marquis d’Espard.” How then could it be that the race of heroes and valiant men belonging to the proud house of Herouville, who gave the famous marshal to the nation, cardinals to the church, great leaders to the Valois, knights to Louis XIV., was reduced to a little fragile being smaller than Butscha? That is a question which we ask ourselves in more than one salon in Paris when we hear the greatest names of France announced, and see the entrance of a thin, pinched, undersized young man, scarcely possessing the breath of life, or a premature old one, or some whimsical creature in whom an observer can with great difficulty trace the signs of a past grandeur. The dissipations of the reign of Louis XV., the orgies of that fatal and egotistic period, have produced an effete generation, in which manners alone survive the nobler vanished qualities,—forms, which are the sole heritage our nobles have preserved. The abandonment in which Louis XVI. was allowed to perish may thus be explained, with some slight reservations, as a wretched result of the reign of Madame de Pompadour.

The grand equerry, a fair young man with blue eyes and a pallid face, was not without a certain dignity of thought; but his thin, undersized figure, and the follies of his aunt who had taken him to the Vilquins and elsewhere to pay his court, rendered him extremely diffident. The house of Herouville had already been threatened with extinction by the deed of a deformed being (see the “Enfant Maudit” in “Philosophical Studies”). The grand marshal, that being the family term for the member who was made duke by Louis XIII., married at the age of eighty. The young duke admired women, but he placed them too high and respected them too much; in fact, he adored them, and was only at his ease with those whom he could not respect. This characteristic caused him to lead a double life. He found compensation with women of easy virtue for the worship to which he surrendered himself in the salons, or, if you like, the boudoirs, of the faubourg Saint-Germain. Such habits and his puny figure, his suffering face with its blue eyes turning upward in ecstasy, increased the ridicule already bestowed upon

him,—very unjustly bestowed, as it happened, for he was full of wit and delicacy; but his wit, which never sparkled, only showed itself when he felt at ease. Fanny Beaupre, an actress who was supposed to be his nearest friend (at a price), called him “a sound wine so carefully corked that you break all your corkscrews.” The beautiful Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, whom the grand equerry could only worship, annihilated him with a speech which, unfortunately, was repeated from mouth to mouth, like all such pretty and malicious sayings.

“He always seems to me,” she said, “like one of those jewels of fine workmanship which we exhibit but never wear, and keep in cotton-wool.”

Everything about him, even to his absurdly contrasting title of grand equerry, amused the good-natured king, Charles X., and made him laugh,—although the Duc d’Herouville justified his appointment in the matter of being a fine horseman. Men are like books, often understood and appreciated too late. Modeste had seen the duke during his fruitless visit to the Vilquins, and many of these reflections passed through her mind as she watched him come and go. But under the circumstances in which she now found herself, she saw plainly that the courtship of the Duc d’Herouville would save her from being at the mercy of either Canalis.

“I see no reason,” she said to Latournelle, “why the Duc d’Herouville should not be received. I have passed, in spite of our indigence,” she continued, with a mischievous look at her father, “to the condition of heiress. Haven’t you observed Gobenheim’s glances? They have quite changed their character within a week. He is in despair at not being able to make his games of whist count for mute adoration of my charms.”

“Hush, my darling!” cried Madame Latournelle, “here he comes.”

“Old Althor is in despair,” said Gobenheim to Monsieur Mignon as he entered.

“Why?” asked the count.

“Vilquin is going to fail; and the Bourse thinks you are worth several millions. What ill-luck for his son!”

“No one knows,” said Charles Mignon, coldly, “what my liabilities in India are; and I do not intend to take the public into my confidence as to my private affairs. Dumay,” he whispered to his friend, “if Vilquin is embarrassed we could get back the villa by paying him what he gave for it.”

Such was the general state of things, due chiefly to accident, when on Sunday morning Canalis and La Briere arrived, with a courier in advance, at the villa of Madame Amaury. It was known that the Duc d’Herouville, his sister, and his

aunt were coming the following Tuesday to occupy, also under pretext of ill-health, a hired house at Graville. This assemblage of suitors made the wits of the Bourse remark that, thanks to Mademoiselle Mignon, rents would rise at Ingouville. “If this goes on, she will have a hospital here,” said the younger Mademoiselle Vilquin, vexed at not becoming a duchess.

The everlasting comedy of “The Heiress,” about to be played at the Chalet, might very well be called, in view of Modeste’s frame of mind, “The Designs of a Young Girl”; for since the overthrow of her illusions she had fully made up her mind to give her hand to no man whose qualifications did not fully satisfy her.

The two rivals, still intimate friends, intended to pay their first visit at the Chalet on the evening of the day succeeding their arrival. They had spent Sunday and part of Monday in unpacking and arranging Madame Amaury’s house for a month’s stay. The poet, always calculating effects, wished to make the most of the probable excitement which his arrival would case in Havre, and which would of course echo up to the Mignons. Therefore, in his role of a man needing rest, he did not leave the house. La Briere went twice to walk past the Chalet, though always with a sense of despair, for he feared to displease Modeste, and the future seemed to him dark with clouds. The two friends came down to dinner on Monday dressed for the momentous visit. La Briere wore the same clothes he had so carefully selected for the famous Sunday; but he now felt like the satellite of a planet, and resigned himself to the uncertainties of his situation. Canalis, on the other hand, had carefully attended to his black coat, his orders, and all those little drawing-room elegancies, which his intimacy with the Duchesse de Chaulieu and the fashionable world of the faubourg had brought to perfection. He had gone into the minutiae of dandyism, while poor La Briere was about to present himself with the negligence of a man without hope. Germain, as he waited at dinner could not help smiling to himself at the contrast. After the second course, however, the valet came in with a diplomatic, that is to say, uneasy air.

“Does Monsieur le baron know,” he said to Canalis in a low voice, “that Monsieur the grand equerry is coming to Graville to get cured of the same illness which has brought Monsieur de La Briere and Monsieur le baron to the sea-shore?”

“What, the little Duc d’Herouville?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Is he coming for Mademoiselle de La Bastie?” asked La Briere, coloring.

“So it appears, monsieur.”

“We are cheated!” cried Canalis looking at La Briere.

“Ah!” retorted Ernest quickly, “that is the first time you have said, ‘we’ since we left Paris: it has been ‘I’ all along.”

“You understood me,” cried Canalis, with a burst of laughter. “But we are not in a position to struggle against a ducal coronet, nor the duke’s title, nor against the waste lands which the Council of State have just granted, on my report, to the house of Herouville.”

“His grace,” said La Briere, with a spice of malice that was nevertheless serious, “will furnish you with compensation in the person of his sister.”

At this instant, the Comte de La Bastie was announced; the two young men rose at once, and La Briere hastened forward to present Canalis.

“I wished to return the visit that you paid me in Paris,” said the count to the young lawyer, “and I knew that by coming here I should have the double pleasure of greeting one of our great living poets.”

“Great!—Monsieur,” replied the poet, smiling, “no one can be great in a century prefaced by the reign of a Napoleon. We are a tribe of would-be great poets; besides, second-rate talent imitates genius nowadays, and renders real distinction impossible.”

“Is that the reason why you have thrown yourself into politics?” asked the count.

“It is the same thing in that sphere,” said the poet; “there are no statesmen in these days, only men who handle events more or less. Look at it, monsieur; under the system of government that we derive from the Charter, which makes a tax-list of more importance than a coat-of-arms, there is absolutely nothing solid except that which you went to seek in China,—wealth.”

Satisfied with himself and with the impression he was making on the prospective father-in-law, Canalis turned to Germain.

“Serve the coffee in the salon,” he said, inviting Monsieur de La Bastie to leave the dining-room.

“I thank you for this visit, monsieur le comte,” said La Briere; “it saves me from the embarrassment of presenting my friend to you in your own house. You have a heart, and you have also a quick mind.”

“Bah! the ready wit of Provence, that is all,” said Charles Mignon.

“Ah, do you come from Provence?” cried Canalis.

“You must pardon my friend,” said La Briere; “he has not studied, as I have, the history of La Bastie.”

At the word *friend* Canalis threw a searching glance at Ernest.

“If your health will allow,” said the count to the poet, “I shall hope to receive you this evening under my roof; it will be a day to mark, as the old writer said ‘albo notanda lapillo.’ Though we cannot duly receive so great a fame in our little house, yet your visit will gratify my daughter, whose admiration for your poems has even led her to set them to music.”

“You have something better than fame in your house,” said Canalis; “you have beauty, if I am to believe Ernest.”

“Yes, a good daughter; but you will find her rather countrified,” said Charles Mignon.

“A country girl sought by the Duc d’Herouville,” remarked Canalis, dryly.

“Oh!” replied Monsieur Mignon, with the perfidious good-humor of a Southerner, “I leave my daughter free. Dukes, princes, commoners,—they are all the same to me, even men of genius. I shall make no pledges, and whoever my Modeste chooses will be my son-in-law, or rather my son,” he added, looking at La Briere. “It could not be otherwise. Madame de La Bastie is German. She has never adopted our etiquette, and I let my two women lead me their own way. I have always preferred to sit in the carriage rather than on the box. I can make a joke of all this at present, for we have not yet seen the Duc d’Herouville, and I do not believe in marriages arranged by proxy, any more than I believe in choosing my daughter’s husband.”

“That declaration is equally encouraging and discouraging to two young men who are searching for the philosopher’s stone of happiness in marriage,” said Canalis.

“Don’t you consider it useful, necessary, and even politic to stipulate for perfect freedom of action for parents, daughters, and suitors?” asked Charles Mignon.

Canalis, at a sign from La Briere, kept silence. The conversation presently became unimportant, and after a few turns round the garden the count retired, urging the visit of the two friends.

“That’s our dismissal,” cried Canalis; “you saw it as plainly as I did. Well, in his place, I should not hesitate between the grand equerry and either of us, charming as we are.”

“I don’t think so,” said La Briere. “I believe that frank soldier came here to satisfy his desire to see you, and to warn us of his neutrality while receiving us in his house. Modeste, in love with your fame, and misled by my person, stands,

as it were, between the real and the ideal, between poetry and prose. I am, unfortunately, the prose."

"Germain," said Canalis to the valet, who came to take away the coffee, "order the carriage in half an hour. We will take a drive before we go to the Chalet."

CHAPTER XVIII. A SPLENDID FIRST APPEARANCE

The two young men were equally impatient to see Modeste, but La Briere dreaded the interview, while Canalis approached it with the confidence of self-conceit. The eagerness with which La Briere had met the father, and the flattery of his attention to the family pride of the ex-merchant, showed Canalis his own maladroitness, and determined him to select a special role. The great poet resolved to pretend indifference, though all the while displaying his seductive powers; to appear to disdain the young lady, and thus pique her self-love. Trained by the handsome Duchesse de Chaulieu, he was bound to be worthy of his reputation as a man who knew women, when, in fact, he did not know them at all,—which is often the case with those who are the happy victims of an exclusive passion. While poor Ernest, gloomily ensconced in his corner of the caleche, gave way to the terrors of genuine love, and foresaw instinctively the anger, contempt, and disdain of an injured and offended young girl, Canalis was preparing himself, not less silently, like an actor making ready for an important part in a new play; certainly neither of them presented the appearance of a happy man. Important interests were involved for Canalis. The mere suggestion of his desire to marry would bring about a rupture of the tie which had bound him for the last ten years to the Duchesse de Chaulieu. Though he had covered the purpose of his journey with the vulgar pretext of needing rest,—in which, by the bye, women never believe, even when it is true,—his conscience troubled him somewhat; but the word “conscience” seemed so Jesuitical to La Briere that he shrugged his shoulders when the poet mentioned his scruples.

“Your conscience, my friend, strikes me as nothing more nor less than a dread of losing the pleasures of vanity, and some very real advantages and habits by sacrificing the affections of Madame de Chaulieu; for, if you were sure of succeeding with Modeste, you would renounce without the slightest compunction the wilted aftermath of a passion that has been mown and well-raked for the last eight years. If you simply mean that you are afraid of displeasing your protectress, should she find out the object of your stay here, I believe you. To renounce the duchess and yet not succeed at the Chalet is too heavy a risk. You take the anxiety of this alternative for remorse.”

“You have no comprehension of feelings,” said the poet, irritably, like a man

who hears truth when he expects a compliment.

“That is what a bigamist should tell the jury,” retorted La Briere, laughing.

This epigram made another disagreeable impression on Canalis. He began to think La Briere too witty and too free for a secretary.

The arrival of an elegant caleche, driven by a coachman in the Canalis livery, made the more excitement at the Chalet because the two suitors were expected, and all the personages of this history were assembled to receive them, except the duke and Butscha.

“Which is the poet?” asked Madame Latournelle of Dumay in the embrasure of a window, where she stationed herself as soon as she heard the wheels.

“The one who walks like a drum-major,” answered the lieutenant.

“Ah!” said the notary’s wife, examining Canalis, who was swinging his body like a man who knows he is being looked at. The fault lay with the great lady who flattered him incessantly and spoiled him,—as all women older than their adorers invariably spoil and flatter them; Canalis in his moral being was a sort of Narcissus. When a woman of a certain age wishes to attach a man forever, she begins by deifying his defects, so as to cut off all possibility of rivalry; for a rival is never, at the first approach, aware of the super-fine flattery to which the man is accustomed. Coxcombs are the product of this feminine manoeuvre, when they are not fops by nature. Canalis, taken young by the handsome duchess, vindicated his affectations to his own mind by telling himself that they pleased that “grande dame,” whose taste was law. Such shades of character may be excessively faint, but it is improper for the historian not to point them out. For instance, Melchior possessed a talent for reading which was greatly admired, and much injudicious praise had given him a habit of exaggeration, which neither poets nor actors are willing to check, and which made people say of him (always through De Marsay) that he no longer declaimed, he bellowed his verses; lengthening the sounds that he might listen to himself. In the slang of the green-room, Canalis “dragged the time.” He was fond of exchanging glances with his hearers, throwing himself into postures of self-complacency and practising those tricks of demeanor which actors call “balancoires,”—the picturesque phrase of an artistic people. Canalis had his imitators, and was in fact the head of a school of his kind. This habit of declamatory chanting slightly affected his conversation, as we have seen in his interview with Dumay. The moment the mind becomes finical the manners follow suit, and the great poet ended by studying his demeanor, inventing attitudes, looking furtively at himself in mirrors, and suiting his discourse to the particular pose which he happened to have taken up. He was

so preoccupied with the effect he wished to produce, that a practical joke, Blondet, had bet once or twice, and won the wager, that he could nonplus him at any moment by merely looking fixedly at his hair, or his boots, or the tails of his coats.

These airs and graces, which started in life with a passport of flowery youth, now seemed all the more stale and old because Melchior himself was waning. Life in the world of fashion is quite as exhausting to men as it is to women, and perhaps the twenty years by which the duchess exceeded her lover's age, weighed more heavily upon him than upon her; for to the eyes of the world she was always handsome,—without rouge, without wrinkles, and without heart. Alas! neither men nor women have friends who are friendly enough to warn them of the moment when the fragrance of their modesty grows stale, when the caressing glance is but an echo of the stage, when the expression of the face changes from sentiment to sentimentality, and the artifices of the mind show their rusty edges. Genius alone renews its skin like a snake; and in the matter of charm, as in everything else, it is only the heart that never grows old. People who have hearts are simple in all their ways. Now Canalis, as we know, had a shrivelled heart. He misused the beauty of his glance by giving it, without adequate reason, the fixity that comes to the eyes in meditation. In short, applause was to him a business, in which he was perpetually on the lookout for gain. His style of paying compliments, charming to superficial people, seemed insulting to others of more delicacy, by its triteness and the cool assurance of its cut-and-dried flattery. As a matter of fact, Melchior lied like a courtier. He remarked without blushing to the Duc de Chaulieu, who made no impression whatever when he was obliged to address the Chamber as minister of foreign affairs, "Your excellency was truly sublime!" Many men like Canalis are purged of their affectations by the administration of non-success in little doses.

These defects, slight in the gilded salons of the faubourg Saint-Germain, where every one contributes his or her quota of absurdity, and where these particular forms of exaggerated speech and affected diction—magniloquence, if you please to call it so—are surrounded by excessive luxury and sumptuous toilettes, which are to some extent their excuse, were certain to be far more noticed in the provinces, whose own absurdities are of a totally different type. Canalis, by nature over-strained and artificial, could not change his form; in fact, he had had time to grow stiff in the mould into which the duchess had poured him; moreover, he was thoroughly Parisian, or, if you prefer it, truly French. The Parisian is amazed that everything everywhere is not as it in Paris; the Frenchman, as it is in France. Good taste, on the contrary, demands that we adapt

ourselves to the customs of foreigners without losing too much of our own character,—as did Alcibiades, that model of a gentleman. True grace is elastic; it lends itself to circumstances; it is in harmony with all social centres; it wears a robe of simple material in the streets, noticeable only by its cut, in preference to the feathers and flounces of middle-class vulgarity. Now Canalis, instigated by a woman who loved herself much more than she loved him, wished to lay down the law and be, everywhere, such as he himself might see fit to be. He believed he carried his own public with him wherever he went,—an error shared by several of the great men of Paris.

While the poet made a studied and effective entrance into the salon of the Chalet, La Briere slipped in behind him like a person of no account.

“Ha! do I see my soldier?” said Canalis, perceiving Dumay, after addressing a compliment to Madame Mignon, and bowing to the other women. “Your anxieties are relieved, are they not?” he said, offering his hand effusively; “I comprehend them to their fullest extent after seeing mademoiselle. I spoke to you of terrestrial creatures, not of angels.”

All present seemed by their attitudes to ask the meaning of this speech.

“I shall always consider it a triumph,” resumed the poet, observing that everybody wished for an explanation, “to have stirred to mention one of those men of iron whom Napoleon had the eye to find and make the supporting piles on which he tried to build an empire, too colossal to be lasting: for such structures time alone is the cement. But this triumph—why should I be proud of it?—I count for nothing. It was the triumph of ideas over facts. Your battles, my dear Monsieur Dumay, your heroic charges, Monsieur le comte, nay, war itself was the form in which Napoleon’s idea clothed itself. Of all of these things, what remains? The sod that covers them knows nothing; harvests come and go without revealing their resting-place; were it not for the historian, the writer, futurity would have no knowledge of those heroic days. Therefore your fifteen years of war are now ideas and nothing more; that which preserves the Empire forever is the poem that the poets make of them. A nation that can win such battles must know how to sing them.”

Canalis paused, to gather by a glance that ran round the circle the tribute of amazement which he expected of provincials.

“You must be aware, monsieur, of the regret I feel at not seeing you,” said Madame Mignon, “since you compensate me with the pleasure of hearing you.”

Modeste, determined to think Canalis sublime, sat motionless with amazement; the embroidery slipped from her fingers, which held it only by the

needleful of thread.

“Modeste, this is Monsieur Ernest de La Briere. Monsieur Ernest, my daughter,” said the count, thinking the secretary too much in the background.

The young girl bowed coldly, giving Ernest a glance that was meant to prove to every one present that she saw him for the first time.

“Pardon me, monsieur,” she said without blushing; “the great admiration I feel for the greatest of our poets is, in the eyes of my friends, a sufficient excuse for seeing only him.”

The pure, fresh voice, with accents like that of Mademoiselle Mars, charmed the poor secretary, already dazzled by Modeste’s beauty, and in his sudden surprise he answered by a phrase that would have been sublime, had it been true.

“He is my friend,” he said.

“Ah, then you do pardon me,” she replied.

“He is more than a friend,” cried Canalis taking Ernest by the shoulder and leaning upon it like Alexander on Hephaestion, “we love each other as though we were brothers—”

Madame Latournelle cut short the poet’s speech by pointing to Ernest and saying aloud to her husband, “Surely that is the gentleman we saw at church.”

“Why not?” said Charles Mignon, quickly, observing that Ernest reddened.

Modeste coldly took up her embroidery.

“Madame may be right; I have been twice in Havre lately,” replied La Briere, sitting down by Dumay.

Canalis, charmed with Modeste’s beauty, mistook the admiration she expressed, and flattered himself he had succeeded in producing his desired effects.

“I should think a man without heart, if he had no devoted friend near him,” said Modeste, to pick up the conversation interrupted by Madame Latournelle’s awkwardness.

“Mademoiselle, Ernest’s devotion makes me almost think myself worth something,” said Canalis; “for my dear Pylades is full of talent; he was the right hand of the greatest minister we have had since the peace. Though he holds a fine position, he is good enough to be my tutor in the science of politics; he teaches me to conduct affairs and feeds me with his experience, when all the while he might aspire to a much better situation. Oh! he is worth far more than I.” At a gesture from Modeste he continued gracefully: “Yes, the poetry that I express he carries in his heart; and if I speak thus openly before him it is because

he has the modesty of a nun."

"Enough, oh, enough!" cried La Briere, who hardly knew which way to look. "My dear Canalis, you remind me of a mother who is seeking to marry off her daughter."

"How is it, monsieur," said Charles Mignon, addressing Canalis, "that you can even think of becoming a political character?"

"It is abdication," said Modeste, "for a poet; politics are the resource of matter-of-fact men."

"Ah, mademoiselle, the rostrum is to-day the greatest theatre of the world; it has succeeded the tournaments of chivalry, it is now the meeting-place for all intellects, just as the army has been the rallying-point of courage."

Canalis stuck spurs into his charger and talked for ten minutes on political life: "Poetry was but a preface to the statesman." "To-day the orator has become a sublime reasoner, the shepherd of ideas." "A poet may point the way to nations or individuals, but can he ever cease to be himself?" He quoted Chateaubriand and declared that he would one day be greater on the political side than on the literary. "The forum of France was to be the pharos of humanity." "Oral battles supplanted fields of battle: there were sessions of the Chamber finer than any Austerlitz, and orators were seen to be as lofty as generals; they spent their lives, their courage, their strength, as freely as those who went to war." "Speech was surely one of the most prodigal outlets of the vital fluid that man had ever known," etc.

This improvisation of modern commonplaces, clothed in sonorous phrases and newly invented words, and intended to prove that the Comte de Canalis was becoming one of the glories of the French government, made a deep impression upon the notary and Gobenheim, and upon Madame Latournelle and Madame Mignon. Modeste looked as though she were at the theatre, in an attitude of enthusiasm for an actor,—very much like that of Ernest toward herself; for though the secretary knew all these high-sounding phrases by heart, he listened through the eyes, as it were, of the young girl, and grew more and more madly in love with her. To this true lover, Modeste was eclipsing all the Modestes he had created as he read her letters and answered them.

This visit, the length of which was predetermined by Canalis, careful not to allow his admirers a chance to get surfeited, ended by an invitation to dinner on the following Monday.

"We shall not be at the Chalet," said the Comte de La Bastie. "Dumay will have sole possession of it. I return to the villa, having bought it back under a

deed of redemption within six months, which I have to-day signed with Monsieur Vilquin."

"I hope," said Dumay, "that Vilquin will not be able to return to you the sum you have just lent him, and that the villa will remain yours."

"It is an abode in keeping with your fortune," said Canalis.

"You mean the fortune that I am supposed to have," replied Charles Mignon, hastily.

"It would be too sad," said Canalis, turning to Modeste with a charming little bow, "if this Madonna were not framed in a manner worthy of her divine perfections."

That was the only thing Canalis said to Modeste. He affected not to look at her, and behaved like a man to whom all idea of marriage was interdicted.

"Ah! my dear Madame Mignon," cried the notary's wife, as soon as the gravel was heard to grit under the feet of the Parisians, "what an intellect!"

"Is he rich?—that is the question," said Gobenheim.

Modeste was at the window, not losing a single movement of the great poet, and paying no attention to his companion. When Monsieur Mignon returned to the salon, and Modeste, having received a last bow from the two friends as the carriage turned, went back to her seat, a weighty discussion took place, such as provincials invariably hold over Parisians after a first interview. Gobenheim repeated his phrase, "Is he rich?" as a chorus to the songs of praise sung by Madame Latournelle, Modeste, and her mother.

"Rich!" exclaimed Modeste; "what can that signify! Do you not see that Monsieur de Canalis is one of those men who are destined for the highest places in the State. He has more than fortune; he possesses that which gives fortune."

"He will be minister or ambassador," said Monsieur Mignon.

"That won't hinder tax-payers from having to pay the costs of his funeral," remarked the notary.

"How so?" asked Charles Mignon.

"He strikes me as a man who will waste all the fortunes with whose gifts Mademoiselle Modeste so liberally endows him," answered Latournelle.

"Modeste can't avoid being liberal to a poet who called her a Madonna," said Dumay, sneering, and faithful to the repulsion with which Canalis had originally inspired him.

Gobenheim arranged the whist-table with all the more persistency because,

since the return of Monsieur Mignon, Latournelle and Dumay had allowed themselves to play for ten sous points.

“Well, my little darling,” said the father to the daughter in the embrasure of a window. “Admit that papa thinks of everything. If you send your orders this evening to your former dressmaker in Paris, and all your other furnishing people, you shall show yourself eight days hence in all the splendor of an heiress. Meantime we will install ourselves in the villa. You already have a pretty horse, now order a habit; you owe that amount of civility to the grand equerry.”

“All the more because there will be a number of us to ride,” said Modeste, who was recovering the colors of health.

“The secretary did not say much,” remarked Madame Mignon.

“A little fool,” said Madame Latournelle; “the poet has an attentive word for everybody. He thanked Monsieur Latournelle for his help in choosing the house; and said he must have taken counsel with a woman of good taste. But the other looked as gloomy as a Spaniard, and kept his eyes fixed on Modeste as though he would like to swallow her whole. If he had even looked at me I should have been afraid of him.”

“He had a pleasant voice,” said Madame Mignon.

“No doubt he came to Havre to inquire about the Mignons in the interests of his friend the poet,” said Modeste, looking furtively at her father. “It was certainly he whom we saw in church.”

Madame Dumay and Monsieur and Madame Latournelle, accepted this as the natural explanation of Ernest’s journey.

CHAPTER XIX. OF WHICH THE AUTHOR THINKS A GOOD DEAL

“Do you know, Ernest,” cried Canalis, when they had driven a short distance from the house, “I don’t see any marriageable woman in society in Paris who compares with that adorable girl.”

“Ah, that ends it!” replied Ernest. “She loves you, or she will love you if you desire it. Your fame won half the battle. Well, you may now have it all your own way. You shall go there alone in future. Modeste despises me; she is right to do so; and I don’t see any reason why I should condemn myself to see, to love, desire, and adore that which I can never possess.”

After a few consoling remarks, dashed with his own satisfaction at having made a new version of Caesar’s phrase, Canalis divulged a desire to break with the Duchesse de Chaulieu. La Briere, totally unable to keep up the conversation, made the beauty of the night an excuse to be set down, and then rushed like one possessed to the seashore, where he stayed till past ten, in a half-demented state, walking hurriedly up and down, talking aloud in broken sentences, sometimes standing still or sitting down, without noticing the uneasiness of two custom-house officers who were on the watch. After loving Modeste’s wit and intellect and her aggressive frankness, he now joined adoration of her beauty—that is to say, love without reason, love inexplicable—to all the other reasons which had drawn him ten days earlier, to the church in Havre.

He returned to the Chalet, where the Pyrenees hounds barked at him till he was forced to relinquish the pleasure of gazing at Modeste’s windows. In love, such things are of no more account to the lover than the work which is covered by the last layer of color is to an artist; yet they make up the whole of love, just as the hidden toil is the whole of art. Out of them arise the great painter and the true lover whom the woman and the public end, sometimes too late, by adoring.

“Well then!” he cried aloud, “I will stay, I will suffer, I will love her for myself only, in solitude. Modeste shall be my sun, my life; I will breathe with her breath, rejoice in her joys and bear her griefs, be she even the wife of that egoist, Canalis.”

“That’s what I call loving, monsieur,” said a voice which came from a shrub by the side of the road. “Ha, ha, so all the world is in love with Mademoiselle de

La Bastie?”

And Butscha suddenly appeared and looked at La Briere. La Briere checked his anger when, by the light of the moon, he saw the dwarf, and he made a few steps without replying.

“Soldiers who serve in the same company ought to be good comrades,” remarked Butscha. “You don’t love Canalis; neither do I.”

“He is my friend,” replied Ernest.

“Ha, you are the little secretary?”

“You are to know, monsieur, that I am no man’s secretary. I have the honor to be of counsel to a supreme court of this kingdom.”

“I have the honor to salute Monsieur de La Briere,” said Butscha. “I myself have the honor to be head clerk to Latournelle, chief councillor of Havre, and my position is a better one than yours. Yes, I have had the happiness of seeing Mademoiselle Modeste de La Bastie nearly every evening for the last four years, and I expect to live near her, as a king’s servant lives in the Tuileries. If they offered me the throne of Russia I should answer, ‘I love the sun too well.’ Isn’t that telling you, monsieur, that I care more for her than for myself? I am looking after her interests with the most honorable intentions. Do you believe that the proud Duchesse de Chaulieu would cast a favorable eye on the happiness of Madame de Canalis if her waiting-woman, who is in love with Monsieur Germain, not liking that charming valet’s absence in Havre, were to say to her mistress while brushing her hair—”

“Who do you know about all this?” said La Briere, interrupting Butscha.

“In the first place, I am clerk to a notary,” answered Butscha. “But haven’t you seen my hump? It is full of resources, monsieur. I have made myself cousin to Mademoiselle Philoxene Jacmin, born at Honfleur, where my mother was born, a Jacmin,—there are eight branches of the Jacmins at Honfleur. So my cousin Philoxene, enticed by the bait of a highly improbable fortune, has told me a good many things.”

“The duchess is vindictive?” said La Briere.

“Vindictive as a queen, Philoxene says; she has never yet forgiven the duke for being nothing more than her husband,” replied Butscha. “She hates as she loves. I know all about her character, her tastes, her toilette, her religion, and her manners; for Philoxene stripped her for me, soul and corset. I went to the opera expressly to see her, and I didn’t grudge the ten francs it cost me—I don’t mean the play. If my imaginary cousin had not told me the duchess had seen her fifty

summers, I should have thought I was over-generous in giving her thirty; she has never known a winter, that duchess!”

“Yes,” said La Briere, “she is a cameo—preserved because it is stone. Canalis would be in a bad way if the duchess were to find out what he is doing here; and I hope, monsieur, that you will go no further in this business of spying, which is unworthy of an honest man.”

“Monsieur,” said Butscha, proudly; “for me Modeste is my country. I do not spy; I foresee, I take precautions. The duchess will come here if it is desirable, or she will stay tranquilly where she is, according to what I judge best.”

“You?”

“I.”

“And how, pray?”

“Ha, that’s it!” said the little hunchback, plucking a blade of grass. “See here! this herb believes that men build palaces for it to grow in; it wedges its way between the closest blocks of marble, and brings them down, just as the masses forced into the edifice of feudality have brought it to the ground. The power of the feeble life that can creep everywhere is greater than that of the mighty behind their cannons. I am one of three who have sworn that Modeste shall be happy, and we would sell our honor for her. Adieu, monsieur. If you truly love Mademoiselle de La Bastie, forget this conversation and shake hands with me, for I think you’ve got a heart. I longed to see the Chalet, and I got here just as SHE was putting out her light. I saw the dogs rush at you, and I overheard your words, and that is why I take the liberty of saying we serve in the same regiment —that of loyal devotion.”

“Monsieur,” said La Briere, wringing the hunchback’s hand, “would you have the friendliness to tell me if Mademoiselle Modeste ever loved any one WITH LOVE before she wrote to Canalis?”

“Oh!” exclaimed Butscha in an altered voice; “that thought is an insult. And even now, who knows if she really loves? does she know herself? She is enamored of genius, of the soul and intellect of that seller of verses, that literary quack; but she will study him, we shall all study him; and I know how to make the man’s real character peep out from under that turtle-shell of fine manners,—we’ll soon see the petty little head of his ambition and his vanity!” cried Butscha, rubbing his hands. “So, unless mademoiselle is desperately taken with him—”

“Oh! she was seized with admiration when she saw him, as if he were something marvellous,” exclaimed La Briere, letting the secret of his jealousy escape him.

“If he is a loyal, honest fellow, and loves her; if he is worthy of her; if he renounces his duchess,” said Butscha,—“then I’ll manage the duchess! Here, my dear sir, take this road, and you will get home in ten minutes.”

But as they parted, Butscha turned back and hailed poor Ernest, who, as a true lover, would gladly have stayed there all night talking of Modeste.

“Monsieur,” said Butscha, “I have not yet had the honor of seeing our great poet. I am very curious to observe that magnificent phenomenon in the exercise of his functions. Do me the favor to bring him to the Chalet to-morrow evening, and stay as long as possible; for it takes more than an hour for a man to show himself for what he is. I shall be the first to see if he loves, if he can love, or if he ever will love Mademoiselle Modeste.”

“You are very young to—”

“—to be a professor,” said Butscha, cutting short La Briere. “Ha, monsieur, deformed folks are born a hundred years old. And besides, a sick man who has long been sick, knows more than his doctor; he knows the disease, and that is more than can be said for the best of doctors. Well, so it is with a man who cherishes a woman in his heart when the woman is forced to disdain him for his ugliness or his deformity; he ends by knowing so much of love that he becomes seductive, just as the sick man recovers his health; stupidity alone is incurable. I have had neither father nor mother since I was six years old; I am now twenty-five. Public charity has been my mother, the procureur du roi my father. Oh! don’t be troubled,” he added, seeing Ernest’s gesture; “I am much more lively than my situation. Well, for the last six years, ever since a woman’s eye first told me I had no right to love, I do love, and I study women. I began with the ugly ones, for it is best to take the bull by the horns. So I took my master’s wife, who has certainly been an angel to me, for my first study. Perhaps I did wrong; but I couldn’t help it. I passed her through my alembic and what did I find? this thought, crouching at the bottom of her heart, ‘I am not so ugly as they think me’; and if a man were to work upon that thought he could bring her to the edge of the abyss, pious as she is.”

“And have you studied Modeste?”

“I thought I told you,” replied Butscha, “that my life belongs to her, just as France belongs to the king. Do you now understand what you called my spying in Paris? No one but me really knows what nobility, what pride, what devotion,

what mysterious grace, what unwearying kindness, what true religion, gaiety, wit, delicacy, knowledge, and courtesy there are in the soul and in the heart of that adorable creature!”

Butscha drew out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, and La Briere pressed his hand for a long time.

“I live in the sunbeam of her existence; it comes from her, it is absorbed in me; that is how we are united,—as nature is to God, by the Light and by the Word. Adieu, monsieur; never in my life have I talked in this way; but seeing you beneath her windows, I felt in my heart that you loved her as I love her.”

Without waiting for an answer Butscha quitted the poor lover, into whose heart his words had put an inexpressible balm. Ernest resolved to make a friend of him, not suspecting that the chief object of the clerk’s loquacity was to gain communication with some one connected with Canalis. Ernest was rocked to sleep that night by the ebb and flow of thoughts and resolutions and plans for his future conduct, whereas Canalis slept the sleep of the conqueror, which is the sweetest of slumbers after that of the just.

At breakfast next morning, the friends agreed to spend the evening of the following day at the Chalet and initiate themselves into the delights of provincial whist. To get rid of the day they ordered their horses, purchased by Germain at a large price, and started on a voyage of discovery round the country, which was quite as unknown to them as China; for the most foreign thing to Frenchmen in France is France itself.

By dint of reflecting on his position as an unfortunate and despised lover, Ernest went through something of the same process as Modeste’s first letter had forced upon him. Though sorrow is said to develop virtue, it only develops it in virtuous persons; that cleaning-out of the conscience takes place only in persons who are by nature clean. La Briere vowed to endure his sufferings in Spartan silence, to act worthily, and give way to no baseness; while Canalis, fascinated by the enormous “dot,” was telling himself to take every means of captivating the heiress. Selfishness and devotion, the key-notes of the two characters, therefore took, by the action of a moral law which is often very odd in its effects, certain measures that were contrary to their respective natures. The selfish man put on self-abnegation; the man who thought chiefly of others took refuge on the Aventinus of pride. That phenomenon is often seen in political life. Men frequently turn their characters wrong side out, and it sometimes happens that the public is unable to tell which is the right side.

After dinner the two friends heard of the arrival of the grand equerry, who was

presented at the Chalet the same evening by Latournelle. Mademoiselle d'Herouville had contrived to wound that worthy man by sending a footmen to tell him to come to her, instead of sending her nephew in person; thus depriving the notary of a distinguished visit he would certainly have talked about for the rest of his natural life. So Latournelle curtly informed the grand equerry, when he proposed to drive him to the Chalet, that he was engaged to take Madame Latournelle. Guessing from the little man's sulky manner that there was some blunder to repair, the duke said graciously:—

"Then I shall have the pleasure, if you will allow me, of taking Madame Latournelle also."

Disregarding Mademoiselle d'Herouville's haughty shrug, the duke left the room with the notary. Madame Latournelle, half-crazed with joy at seeing the gorgeous carriage at her door, with footmen in royal livery letting down the steps, was too agitated on hearing that the grand equerry had called for her, to find her gloves, her parasol, her absurdity, or her usual air of pompous dignity. Once in the carriage, however, and while expressing confused thanks and civilities to the little duke, she suddenly exclaimed, from a thought in her kind heart,—

"But Butscha, where is he?"

"Let us take Butscha," said the duke, smiling.

When the people on the quays, attracted in groups by the splendor of the royal equipage, saw the funny spectacle, the three little men with the spare gigantic woman, they looked at one another and laughed.

"If you melt all three together, they might make one man fit to mate with that big cod-fish," said a sailor from Bordeaux.

"Is there any other thing you would like to take with you, madame?" asked the duke, jestingly, while the footman awaited his orders.

"No, monseigneur," she replied, turning scarlet and looking at her husband as much as to say, "What did I do wrong?"

"Monsieur le duc honors me by considering that I am a thing," said Butscha; "a poor clerk is usually thought to be a nonentity."

Though this was said with a laugh, the duke colored and did not answer. Great people are to blame for joking with their social inferiors. Jesting is a game, and games presuppose equality; it is to obviate any inconvenient results of this temporary equality that players have the right, after the game is over, not to recognize each other.

The visit of the grand equerry had the ostensible excuse of an important piece of business; namely, the retrieval of an immense tract of waste land left by the sea between the mouths of the two rivers, which tract had just been adjudged by the Council of State to the house of Herouville. The matter was nothing less than putting flood-gates with double bridges, draining three or four hundred acres, cutting canals, and laying out roadways. When the duke had explained the condition of the land, Charles Mignon remarked that time must be allowed for the soil, which was still moving, to settle and grow solid in a natural way.

“Time, which has providentially enriched your house, Monsieur le duc, can alone complete the work,” he said, in conclusion. “It would be prudent to let fifty years elapse before you reclaim the land.”

“Do not let that be your final word, Monsieur le comte,” said the duke. “Come to Herouville and see things for yourself.”

Charles Mignon replied that every capitalist should take time to examine into such matters with a cool head, thus giving the duke a pretext for his visits to the Chalet. The sight of Modeste made a lively impression on the young man, and he asked the favor of receiving her at Herouville with her father, saying that his sister and his aunt had heard much of her, and wished to make her acquaintance. On this the count proposed to present his daughter to those ladies himself, and invited the whole party to dinner on the day of his return to the villa. The duke accepted the invitation. The blue ribbon, the title, and above all, the ecstatic glances of the noble gentleman had an effect upon Modeste; but she appeared to great advantage in carriage, dignity, and conversation. The duke withdrew reluctantly, carrying with him an invitation to visit the Chalet every evening,—an invitation based on the impossibility of a courtier of Charles X. existing for a single evening without his rubber.

The following evening, therefore, Modeste was to see all three of her lovers. No matter what young girls may say, and though the logic of the heart may lead them to sacrifice everything to preference, it is extremely flattering to their self-love to see a number of rival adorers around them,—distinguished or celebrated men, or men of ancient lineage,—all endeavoring to shine and to please. Suffer as Modeste may in general estimation, it must be told she subsequently admitted that the sentiments expressed in her letters paled before the pleasure of seeing three such different minds at war with one another,—three men who, taken separately, would each have done honor to the most exacting family. Yet this luxury of self-love was checked by a misanthropical spitefulness, resulting from the terrible wound she had received,—although by this time she was beginning to think of that wound as a disappointment only. So when her father said to her,

laughing, “Well, Modeste, do you want to be a duchess?” she answered, with a mocking curtsey,—

“Sorrows have made me philosophical.”

“Do you mean to be only a baroness?” asked Butscha.

“Or a viscountess?” said her father.

“How could that be?” she asked quickly.

“If you accept Monsieur de La Briere, he has enough merit and influence to obtain permission from the king to bear my titles and arms.”

“Oh, if it comes to disguising himself, *he* will not make any difficulty,” said Modeste, scornfully.

Butscha did not understand this epigram, whose meaning could only be guessed by Monsieur and Madame Mignon and Dumay.

“When it is a question of marriage, all men disguise themselves,” remarked Latournelle, “and women set them the example. I’ve heard it said ever since I came into the world that ‘Monsieur this or Mademoiselle that has made a good marriage,’—meaning that the other side had made a bad one.”

“Marriage,” said Butscha, “is like a lawsuit; there’s always one side discontented. If one dupes the other, certainly half the husbands in the world are playing a comedy at the expense of the other half.”

“From which you conclude, Sieur Butscha?” inquired Modeste.

“To pay the utmost attention to the manoeuvres of the enemy,” answered the clerk.

“What did I tell you, my darling?” said Charles Mignon, alluding to their conversation on the seashore.

“Men play as many parts to get married as mothers make their daughters play to get rid of them,” said Latournelle.

“Then you approve of stratagems?” said Modeste.

“On both sides,” cried Gobenheim, “and that brings it even.”

This conversation was carried on by fits and starts, as they say, in the intervals of cutting and dealing the cards; and it soon turned chiefly on the merits of the Duc d’Herouville, who was thought very good-looking by little Latournelle, little Dumay, and little Butscha. Without the foregoing discussion on the lawfulness of matrimonial tricks, the reader might possibly find the forthcoming account of the evening so impatiently awaited by Butscha, somewhat too long.

Desplein, the famous surgeon, arrived the next morning, and stayed only long

enough to send to Havre for fresh horses and have them put-to, which took about an hour. After examining Madame Mignon's eyes, he decided that she could recover her sight, and fixed a suitable time, a month later, to perform the operation. This important consultation took place before the assembled members of the Chalet, who stood trembling and expectant to hear the verdict of the prince of science. That illustrious member of the Academy of Sciences put about a dozen brief questions to the blind woman as he examined her eyes in the strong light from a window. Modeste was amazed at the value which a man so celebrated attached to time, when she saw the travelling-carriage piled with books which the great surgeon proposed to read during the journey; for he had left Paris the evening before, and had spent the night in sleeping and travelling. The rapidity and clearness of Desplein's judgment on each answer made by Madame Mignon, his succinct tone, his decisive manner, gave Modeste her first real idea of a man of genius. She perceived the enormous difference between a second-rate man, like Canalis, and Desplein, who was even more than a superior man. A man of genius finds in the consciousness of his talent and in the solidity of his fame an arena of his own, where his legitimate pride can expand and exercise itself without interfering with others. Moreover, his perpetual struggle with men and things leave them no time for the coxcombry of fashionable genius, which makes haste to gather in the harvests of a fugitive season, and whose vanity and self-love are as petty and exacting as a custom-house which levies tithes on all that comes in its way.

Modeste was the more enchanted by this great practical genius, because he was evidently charmed with the exquisite beauty of Modeste,—he, through whose hands so many women had passed, and who had long since examined the sex, as it were, with magnifier and scalpel.

"It would be a sad pity," he said, with an air of gallantry which he occasionally put on, and which contrasted with his assumed brusqueness, "if a mother were deprived of the sight of so charming a daughter."

Modeste insisted on serving the simple breakfast which was all the great surgeon would accept. She accompanied her father and Dumay to the carriage stationed at the garden-gate, and said to Desplein at parting, her eyes shining with hope,—

"And will my dear mamma really see me?"

"Yes, my little sprite, I'll promise you that," he answered, smiling; "and I am incapable of deceiving you, for I, too, have a daughter."

The horses started and carried him off as he uttered the last words with

unexpected grace and feeling. Nothing is more charming than the peculiar unexpectedness of persons of talent.

CHAPTER XX. THE POET DOES HIS EXERCISES

This visit of the great surgeon was the event of the day, and it left a luminous trace in Modeste's soul. The young enthusiast ardently admired the man whose life belonged to others, and in whom the habit of studying physical suffering had destroyed the manifestations of egoism. That evening, when Gobenheim, the Latournelles, and Butscha, Canalis, Ernest, and the Duc d'Herouville were gathered in the salon, they all congratulated the Mignon family on the hopes which Desplein encouraged. The conversation, in which the Modeste of her letters was once more in the ascendant, turned naturally on the man whose genius, unfortunately for his fame, was appreciable only by the faculty and men of science. Gobenheim contributed a phrase which is the sacred chrism of genius as interpreted in these days by public economists and bankers,—

"He makes a mint of money."

"They say he is very grasping," added Canalis.

The praises which Modeste showered on Desplein had annoyed the poet. Vanity acts like a woman,—they both think they are defrauded when love or praise is bestowed on others. Voltaire was jealous of the wit of a roue whom Paris admired for two days; and even a duchess takes offence at a look bestowed upon her maid. The avarice excited by these two sentiments is such that a fraction of them given to the poor is thought robbery.

"Do you think, monsieur," said Modeste, smiling, "that we should judge genius by ordinary standards?"

"Perhaps we ought first of all to define the man of genius," replied Canalis. "One of the conditions of genius is invention,—invention of a form, a system, a force. Napoleon was an inventor, apart from his other conditions of genius. He invented his method of making war. Walter Scott is an inventor, Linnaeus is an inventor, Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier are inventors. Such men are men of genius of the first rank. They renew, increase, or modify both science and art. But Desplein is merely a man whose vast talent consists in properly applying laws already known; in observing, by means of a natural gift, the limits laid down for each temperament, and the time appointed by Nature for an operation. He has not founded, like Hippocrates, the science itself. He has invented no system, as did Galen, Broussais, and Rasori. He is merely an executive genius, like Moscheles on the piano, Paganini on the violin, or Farinelli on his own

larynx,—men who have developed enormous faculties, but who have not created music. You must permit me to discriminate between Beethoven and la Catalani: to one belongs the immortal crown of genius and of martyrdom, to the other innumerable five-franc pieces; one we can pay in coin, but the world remains throughout all time a debtor to the other. Each day increases our debt to Moliere, but Baron's comedies have been overpaid."

"I think you make the prerogative of ideas too exclusive," said Ernest de La Briere, in a quiet and melodious voice, which formed a sudden contrast to the peremptory tones of the poet, whose flexible organ had abandoned its caressing notes for the strident and magisterial voice of the rostrum. "Genius must be estimated according to its utility; and Parmentier, who brought potatoes into general use, Jacquart, the inventor of silk looms; Papin, who first discovered the elastic quality of steam, are men of genius, to whom statues will some day be erected. They have changed, or they will change in a certain sense, the face of the State. It is in that sense that Desplein will always be considered a man of genius by thinkers; they see him attended by a generation of sufferers whose pains are stifled by his hand."

That Ernest should give utterance to this opinion was enough to make Modeste oppose it.

"If that be so, monsieur," she said, "then the man who could discover a way to mow wheat without injuring the straw, by a machine that could do the work of ten men, would be a man of genius."

"Yes, my daughter," said Madame Mignon; "and the poor would bless him for cheaper bread,—he that is blessed by the poor is blessed of God."

"That is putting utility above art," said Modeste, shaking her head.

"Without utility what would become of art?" said Charles Mignon. "What would it rest on? what would it live on? Where would you lodge, and how would you pay the poet?"

"Oh! my dear papa, such opinions are fearfully flat and antediluvian! I am not surprised that Gobenheim and Monsieur de La Briere, who are interested in the solution of social problems should think so; but you, whose life has been the most useless poetry of the century,—useless because the blood you shed all over Europe, and the horrible sufferings exacted by your colossus, did not prevent France from losing ten departments acquired under the Revolution,—how can *you* give in to such excessively pig-tail notions, as the idealists say? It is plain you've just come from China."

The impertinence of Modeste's speech was heightened by a little air of

contemptuous disdain which she purposely put on, and which fairly astounded Madame Mignon, Madame Latournelle, and Dumay. As for Madame Latournelle, she opened her eyes so wide she no longer saw anything. Butscha, whose alert attention was comparable to that of a spy, looked at Monsieur Mignon, expecting to see him flush with sudden and violent indignation.

“A little more, young lady, and you will be wanting in respect for your father,” said the colonel, smiling, and noticing Butscha’s look. “See what it is to spoil one’s children!”

“I am your only child,” she said saucily.

“Child, indeed,” remarked the notary, significantly.

“Monsieur,” said Modeste, turning upon him, “my father is delighted to have me for his governess; he gave me life and I give him knowledge; he will soon owe me something.”

“There seems occasion for it,” said Madame Mignon.

“But mademoiselle is right,” said Canalis, rising and standing before the fireplace in one of the finest attitudes of his collection. “God, in his providence, has given food and clothing to man, but he has not directly given him art. He says to man: ‘To live, thou must bow thyself to earth; to think, thou shalt lift thyself to Me.’ We have as much need of the life of the soul as of the life of the body,—hence, there are two utilities. It is true we cannot be shod by books or clothed by poems. An epic song is not, if you take the utilitarian view, as useful as the broth of a charity kitchen. The noblest ideas will not sail a vessel in place of canvas. It is quite true that the cotton-gin gives us calicoes for thirty sous a yard less than we ever paid before; but that machine and all other industrial perfections will not breathe the breath of life into a people, will not tell futurity of a civilization that once existed. Art, on the contrary, Egyptian, Mexican, Grecian, Roman art, with their masterpieces—now called useless!—reveal the existence of races back in the vague immense of time, beyond where the great intermediary nations, denuded of men of genius, have disappeared, leaving not a line nor a trace behind them! The works of genius are the ‘summum’ of civilization, and presuppose utility. Surely a pair of boots are not as agreeable to your eyes as a fine play at the theatre; and you don’t prefer a windmill to the church of Saint-Ouen, do you? Well then, nations are imbued with the same feelings as the individual man, and the man’s cherished desire is to survive himself morally just as he propagates himself physically. The survival of a people is the work of its men of genius. At this very moment France is proving, energetically, the truth of that theory. She is, undoubtedly, excelled by England

in commerce, industry, and navigation, and yet she is, I believe, at the head of the world,—by reason of her artists, her men of talent, and the good taste of her products. There is no artist and no superior intellect that does not come to Paris for a diploma. There is no school of painting at this moment but that of France; and we shall reign far longer and perhaps more securely by our books than by our swords. In La Briere's system, on the other hand, all that is glorious and lovely must be suppressed,—woman's beauty, music, painting, poetry. Society will not be overthrown, that is true, but, I ask you, who would willingly accept such a life? All useful things are ugly and forbidding. A kitchen is indispensable, but you take care not to sit there; you live in the salon, which you adorn, like this, with superfluous things. Of what *use*, let me ask you, are these charming wall-paintings, this carved wood-work? There is nothing beautiful but that which seems to us useless. We called the sixteenth century the Renascence with admirable truth of language. That century was the dawn of a new era. Men will continue to speak of it when all remembrance of anterior centuries had passed away,—their only merit being that they once existed, like the million beings who count as the rubbish of a generation."

"Rubbish! yes, that may be, but my rubbish is dear to me," said the Duc d'Herouville, laughing, during the silent pause which followed the poet's pompous oration.

"Let me ask," said Butscha, attacking Canalis, "does art, the sphere in which, according to you, genius is required to evolve itself, exist at all? Is it not a splendid lie, a delusion, of the social man? Do I want a landscape scene of Normandy in my bedroom when I can look out and see a better one done by God himself? Our dreams make poems more glorious than Iliads. For an insignificant sum of money I can find at Valogne, at Carentan, in Provence, at Arles, many a Venus as beautiful as those of Titian. The police gazette publishes tales, differing somewhat from those of Walter Scott, but ending tragically with blood, not ink. Happiness and virtue exist above and beyond both art and genius."

"Bravo, Butscha!" cried Madame Latournelle.

"What did he say?" asked Canalis of La Briere, failing to gather from the eyes and attitude of Mademoiselle Mignon the usual signs of artless admiration.

The contemptuous indifference which Modeste had exhibited toward La Briere, and above all, her disrespectful speeches to her father, so depressed the young man that he made no answer to Canalis; his eyes, fixed sorrowfully on Modeste, were full of deep meditation. The Duc d'Herouville took up Butscha's argument and reproduced it with much intelligence, saying finally that the ecstasies of Saint-Theresa were far superior to the creations of Lord Byron.

“Oh, Monsieur le duc,” exclaimed Modeste, “hers was a purely personal poetry, whereas the genius of Lord Byron and Moliere benefit the world.”

“How do you square that opinion with those of Monsieur le baron?” cried Charles Mignon, quickly. “Now you are insisting that genius must be useful, and benefit the world as though it were cotton,—but perhaps you think logic as antediluvian as your poor old father.”

Butscha, La Briere, and Madame Latournelle exchanged glances that were more than half derisive, and drove Modeste to a pitch of irritation that kept her silent for a moment.

“Mademoiselle, do not mind them,” said Canalis, smiling upon her, “we are neither beaten, nor caught in a contradiction. Every work of art, let it be in literature, music, painting, sculpture, or architecture, implies a positive social utility, equal to that of all other commercial products. Art is pre-eminently commerce; presupposes it, in short. An author pockets ten thousand francs for his book; the making of books means the manufactory of paper, a foundry, a printing-office, a bookseller,—in other words, the employment of thousands of men. The execution of a symphony of Beethoven or an opera by Rossini requires human arms and machinery and manufactures. The cost of a monument is an almost brutal case in point. In short, I may say that the works of genius have an extremely costly basis and are, necessarily, useful to the workingman.”

Astride of that theme, Canalis spoke for some minutes with a fine luxury of metaphor, and much inward complacency as to his phrases; but it happened with him, as with many another great speaker, that he found himself at last at the point from which the conversation started, and in full agreement with La Briere without perceiving it.

“I see with much pleasure, my dear baron,” said the little duke, slyly, “that you will make an admirable constitutional minister.”

“Oh!” said Canalis, with the gesture of a great man, “what is the use of all these discussions? What do they prove?—the eternal verity of one axiom: All things are true, all things are false. Moral truths as well as human beings change their aspect according to their surroundings, to the point of being actually unrecognizable.”

“Society exists through settled opinions,” said the Duc d’Herouville.

“What laxity!” whispered Madame Latournelle to her husband.

“He is a poet,” said Gobenheim, who overheard her.

Canalis, who was ten leagues above the heads of his audience, and who may

have been right in his last philosophical remark, took the sort of coldness which now overspread the surrounding faces of a symptom of provincial ignorance; but seeing that Modeste understood him, he was content, being wholly unaware that monologue is particularly disagreeable to country-folk, whose principal desire it is to exhibit the manner of life and the wit and wisdom of the provinces to Parisians.

“It is long since you have seen the Duchesse de Chaulieu?” asked the duke, addressing Canalis, as if to change the conversation.

“I left her about six days ago.”

“Is she well?” persisted the duke.

“Perfectly well.”

“Have the kindness to remember me to her when you write.”

“They say she is charming,” remarked Modeste, addressing the duke.

“Monsieur le baron can speak more confidently than I,” replied the grand equerry.

“More than charming,” said Canalis, making the best of the duke’s perfidy; “but I am partial, mademoiselle; she has been a friend to me for the last ten years; I owe all that is good in me to her; she has saved me from the dangers of the world. Moreover, Monsieur le Duc de Chaulieu launched me in my present career. Without the influence of that family the king and the princesses would have forgotten a poor poet like me; therefore my affection for the duchess must always be full of gratitude.”

His voice quivered.

“We ought to love the woman who has led you to write those sublime poems, and who inspires you with such noble feelings,” said Modeste, quite affected. “Who can think of a poet without a muse!”

“He would be without a heart,” replied Canalis. “He would write barren verses like Voltaire, who never loved any one but Voltaire.”

“I thought you did me the honor to say, in Paris,” interrupted Dumay, “that you never felt the sentiments you expressed.”

“The shoe fits, my soldier,” replied the poet, smiling; “but let me tell you that it is quite possible to have a great deal of feeling both in the intellectual life and in real life. My good friend here, La Briere, is madly in love,” continued Canalis, with a fine show of generosity, looking at Modeste. “I, who certainly love as much as he,—that is, I think so unless I delude myself,—well, I can give to my love a literary form in harmony with its character. But I dare not say,

mademoiselle," he added, turning to Modeste with too studied a grace, "that to-morrow I may not be without inspiration."

Thus the poet triumphed over all obstacles. In honor of his love he rode a-tilt at the hindrances that were thrown in his way, and Modeste remained wonder-struck at the Parisian wit that scintillated in his declamatory discourse, of which she had hitherto known little or nothing.

"What an acrobat!" whispered Butscha to Latournelle, after listening to a magnificent tirade on the Catholic religion and the happiness of having a pious wife,—served up in response to a remark by Madame Mignon.

Modeste's eyes were blindfolded as it were; Canalis's elocution and the close attention which she was predetermined to pay to him prevented her from seeing that Butscha was carefully noting the declamation, the want of simplicity, the emphasis that took the place of feeling, and the curious incoherencies in the poet's speech which led the dwarf to make his rather cruel comment. At certain points of Canalis's discourse, when Monsieur Mignon, Dumay, Butscha, and Latournelle wondered at the man's utter want of logic, Modeste admired his suppleness, and said to herself, as she dragged him after her through the labyrinth of fancy, "He loves me!" Butscha, in common with the other spectators of what we must call a stage scene, was struck with the radiant defect of all egoists, which Canalis, like many men accustomed to perorate, allowed to be too plainly seen. Whether he understood beforehand what the person he was speaking to meant to say, whether he was not listening, or whether he had the faculty of listening when he was thinking of something else, it is certain that Melchior's face wore an absent-minded look in conversation, which disconcerted the ideas of others and wounded their vanity. Not to listen is not merely a want of politeness, it is a mark of disrespect. Canalis pushed this habit too far; for he often forgot to answer a speech which required an answer, and passed, without the ordinary transitions of courtesy, to the subject, whatever it was, that preoccupied him. Though such impertinence is accepted without protest from a man of marked distinction, it stirs a leaven of hatred and vengeance in many hearts; in those of equals it even goes so far as to destroy a friendship. If by chance Melchior was forced to listen, he fell into another fault; he merely lent his attention, and never gave it. Though this may not be so mortifying, it shows a kind of semi-concession which is almost as unsatisfactory to the hearer and leaves him dissatisfied. Nothing brings more profit in the commerce of society than the small change of attention. He that heareth let him hear, is not only a gospel precept, it is an excellent speculation; follow it, and all will be forgiven you, even vice. Canalis took a great deal of trouble in his

anxiety to please Modeste; but though he was compliant enough with her, he fell back into his natural self with the others.

Modeste, pitiless for the ten martyrs she was making, begged Canalis to read some of his poems; she wanted, she said, a specimen of his gift for reading, of which she had heard so much. Canalis took the volume which she gave him, and cooed (for that is the proper word) a poem which is generally considered his finest,—an imitation of Moore's "Loves of the Angels," entitled "Vitalis," which Monsieur and Madame Dumay, Madame Latournelle, and Gobenheim welcomed with a few yawns.

"If you are a good whist-player, monsieur," said Gobenheim, flourishing five cards held like a fan, "I must say I have never met a man as accomplished as you."

The remark raised a laugh, for it was the translation of everybody's thought.

"I play it sufficiently well to live in the provinces for the rest of my days," replied Canalis. "That, I think, is enough, and more than enough literature and conversation for whist-players," he added, throwing the volume impatiently on a table.

This little incident serves to show what dangers environ a drawing-room hero when he steps, like Canalis, out of his sphere; he is like the favorite actor of a second-rate audience, whose talent is lost when he leaves his own boards and steps upon those of an upper-class theatre.

CHAPTER XXI. MODESTE PLAYS HER PART

The game opened with the baron and the duke, Gobenheim and Latournelle as partners. Modeste took a seat near the poet, to Ernest's deep disappointment; he watched the face of the wayward girl, and marked the progress of the fascination which Canalis exerted over her. La Briere had not the gift of seduction which Melchior possessed. Nature frequently denies it to true hearts, who are, as a rule, timid. This gift demands fearlessness, an alacrity of ways and means that might be called the trapeze of the mind; a little mimicry goes with it; in fact there is always, morally speaking, something of the comedian in a poet. There is a vast difference between expressing sentiments we do not feel, though we may imagine all their variations, and feigning to feel them when bidding for success on the theatre of private life. And yet, though the necessary hypocrisy of a man of the world may have gangrened a poet, he ends by carrying the faculties of his talent into the expression of any required sentiment, just as a great man doomed to solitude ends by infusing his heart into his mind.

"He is after the millions," thought La Briere, sadly; "and he can play passion so well that Modeste will believe him."

Instead of endeavoring to appear more amiable and wittier than his rival, Ernest imitated the Duc d'Herouville, and was gloomy, anxious, and watchful; but whereas the courier studied the freaks of the young heiress, Ernest simply fell a prey to the pains of dark and concentrated jealousy. He had not yet been able to obtain a glance from his idol. After a while he left the room with Butscha.

"It is all over!" he said; "she is caught by him; I am more disagreeable to her, and moreover, she is right. Canalis is charming; there's intellect in his silence, passion in his eyes, poetry in his rhodomontades."

"Is he an honest man?" asked Butscha.

"Oh, yes," replied La Briere. "He is loyal and chivalrous, and capable of getting rid, under Modeste's influence, of those affectations which Madame de Chaulieu has taught him."

"You are a fine fellow," said the hunchback; "but is he capable of loving,—will he love her?"

"I don't know," answered La Briere. "Has she said anything about me?" he

asked after a moment’s silence.

“Yes,” said Butscha, and he repeated Modeste’s speech about disguises.

Poor Ernest flung himself upon a bench and held his head in his hands. He could not keep back his tears, and he did not wish Butscha to see them; but the dwarf was the very man to guess his emotion.

“What troubles you?” he asked.

“She is right!” cried Ernest, springing up; “I am a wretch.”

And he related the deception into which Canalis had led him when Modeste’s first letter was received, carefully pointing out to Butscha that he had wished to undeceive the young girl before she herself took off the mask, and apostrophizing, in rather juvenile fashion, his luckless destiny. Butscha sympathetically understood the love in the flavor and vigor of his simple language, and in his deep and genuine anxiety.

“But why don’t you show yourself to Mademoiselle Modeste for what you are?” he said; “why do you let your rival do his exercises?”

“Have you never felt your throat tighten when you wished to speak to her?” cried La Briere; “is there never a strange feeling in the roots of your hair and on the surface of your skin when she looks at you,—even if she is thinking of something else?”

“But you had sufficient judgment to show displeasure when she as good as told her excellent father that he was a dolt.”

“Monsieur, I love her too well not to have felt a knife in my heart when I heard her contradicting her own perfections.”

“Canalis supported her.”

“If she had more self-love than heart there would be nothing for a man to regret in losing her,” answered La Briere.

At this moment, Modeste, followed by Canalis, who had lost the rubber, came out with her father and Madame Dumay to breathe the fresh air of the starry night. While his daughter walked about with the poet, Charles Mignon left her and came up to La Briere.

“Your friend, monsieur, ought to have been a lawyer,” he said, smiling and looking attentively at the young man.

“You must not judge a poet as you would an ordinary man,—as you would me, for example, Monsieur le comte,” said La Briere. “A poet has a mission. He is obliged by his nature to see the poetry of questions, just as he expresses that of things. When you think him inconsistent with himself he is really faithful to his

vocation. He is a painter copying with equal truth a Madonna and a courtesan. Moliere is as true to nature in his old men as in his young ones, and Moliere's judgment was assuredly a sound and healthy one. These witty paradoxes might be dangerous for second-rate minds, but they have no real influence on the character of great men."

Charles Mignon pressed La Briere's hand.

"That adaptability, however, leads a man to excuse himself in his own eyes for actions that are diametrically opposed to each other; above all, in politics."

"Ah, mademoiselle," Canalis was at this moment saying, in a caressing voice, replying to a roguish remark of Modeste, "do not think that a multiplicity of emotions can in any way lessen the strength of feelings. Poets, even more than other men, must needs love with constancy and faith. You must not be jealous of what is called the Muse. Happy is the wife of a man whose days are occupied. If you heard the complaints of women who have to endure the burden of an idle husband, either a man without duties, or one so rich as to have nothing to do, you would know that the highest happiness of a Parisian wife is freedom,—the right to rule in her own home. Now we writers and men of functions and occupations, we leave the sceptre to our wives; we cannot descend to the tyranny of little minds; we have something better to do. If I ever marry,—which I assure you is a catastrophe very remote at the present moment,—I should wish my wife to enjoy the same moral freedom that a mistress enjoys, and which is perhaps the real source of her attraction."

Canalis talked on, displaying the warmth of his fancy and all his graces, for Modeste's benefit, as he spoke of love, marriage, and the adoration of women, until Monsieur Mignon, who had rejoined them, seized the opportunity of a slight pause to take his daughter's arm and lead her up to Ernest de La Briere, whom he had been advising to seek an open explanation with her.

"Mademoiselle," said Ernest, in a voice that was scarcely his own, "it is impossible for me to remain any longer under the weight of your displeasure. I do not defend myself; I do not seek to justify my conduct; I desire only to make you see that *before* reading your most flattering letter, addressed to the individual and no longer to the poet,—the last which you sent to me,—I wished, and I told you in my note written at Havre that I wished, to correct the error under which you were acting. All the feelings that I have had the happiness to express to you are sincere. A hope dawned on me in Paris when your father told me he was comparatively poor,—but now that all is lost, now that nothing is left for me but endless regrets, why should I stay here where all is torture? Let me carry away with me one smile to live forever in my heart."

“Monsieur,” answered Modeste, who seemed cold and absent-minded, “I am not the mistress of this house; but I certainly should deeply regret to retain any one where he finds neither pleasure nor happiness.”

She left La Briere and took Madame Dumay’s arm to re-enter the house. A few moments later all the actors in this domestic scene reassembled in the salon, and were a good deal surprised to see Modeste sitting beside the Duc d’Herouville and coquetting with him like an accomplished Parisian woman. She watched his play, gave him the advice he wanted, and found occasion to say flattering things by ranking the merits of noble birth with those of genius and beauty. Canalis thought he knew the reason of this change; he had tried to pique Modeste by calling marriage a catastrophe, and showing that he was aloof from it; but like others who play with fire, he had burned his fingers. Modeste’s pride and her present disdain frightened him, and he endeavored to recover his ground, exhibiting a jealousy which was all the more visible because it was artificial. Modeste, implacable as an angel, tasted the sweets of power, and, naturally enough, abused it. The Duc d’Herouville had never known such a happy evening; a woman smiled on him! At eleven o’clock, an unheard-of hour at the Chalet, the three suitors took their leave,—the duke thinking Modeste charming, Canalis believing her excessively coquettish, and La Briere heart-broken by her cruelty.

For eight days the heiress continued to be to her three lovers very much what she had been during that evening; so that the poet appeared to carry the day against his rivals, in spite of certain freaks and caprices which from time to time gave the Duc d’Herouville a little hope. The disrespect she showed to her father, and the great liberties she took with him; her impatience with her blind mother, to whom she seemed to grudge the little services which had once been the delight of her filial piety,—seemed the result of a capricious nature and a heedless gaiety indulged from childhood. When Modeste went too far, she turned round and openly took herself to task, ascribing her impertinence and levity to a spirit of independence. She acknowledged to the duke and Canalis her distaste for obedience, and professed to regard it as an obstacle to her marriage; thus investigating the nature of her suitors, after the manner of those who dig into the earth in search of metals, coal, tufa, or water.

“I shall never,” she said, the evening before the day on which the family were to move into the villa, “find a husband who will put up with my caprices as my father does; his kindness never flags. I am sure no one will ever be as indulgent to me as my precious mother.”

“They know that you love them, mademoiselle,” said La Briere.

“You may be very sure, mademoiselle, that your husband will know the full value of his treasure,” added the duke.

“You have spirit and resolution enough to discipline a husband,” cried Canalis, laughing.

Modeste smiled as Henri IV. must have smiled after drawing out the characters of his three principal ministers, for the benefit of a foreign ambassador, by means of three answers to an insidious question.

On the day of the dinner, Modeste, led away by the preference she bestowed on Canalis, walked alone with him up and down the gravelled space which lay between the house and the lawn with its flower-beds. From the gestures of the poet, and the air and manner of the young heiress, it was easy to see that she was listening favorably to him. The two demoiselles d’Herouville hastened to interrupt the scandalous tete-a-tete; and with the natural cleverness of women under such circumstances, they turned the conversation on the court, and the distinction of an appointment under the crown,—pointing out the difference that existed between appointments in the household of the king and those of the crown. They tried to intoxicate Modeste’s mind by appealing to her pride, and describing one of the highest stations to which a woman could aspire.

“To have a duke for a son,” said the elder lady, “is an actual advantage. The title is a fortune that we secure to our children without the possibility of loss.”

“How is it, then,” said Canalis, displeased at his tete-a-tete being thus broken in upon, “that Monsieur le duc has had so little success in a matter where his title would seem to be of special service to him?”

The two ladies cast a look at Canalis as full of venom as the tooth of a snake, and they were so disconcerted by Modeste’s amused smile that they were actually unable to reply.

“Monsieur le duc has never blamed you,” she said to Canalis, “for the humility with which you bear your fame; why should you attack him for his modesty?”

“Besides, we have never yet met a woman worthy of my nephew’s rank,” said Mademoiselle d’Herouville. “Some had only the wealth of the position; others, without fortune, had the wit and birth. I must admit that we have done well to wait till God granted us an opportunity to meet one in whom we find the noble blood, the mind, and fortune of a Duchesse d’Herouville.”

“My dear Modeste,” said Helene d’Herouville, leading her new friend apart, “there are a thousand barons in the kingdom, just as there are a hundred poets in Paris, who are worth as much as he; he is so little of a great man that even I, a

poor girl forced to take the veil for want of a ‘dot,’ I would not take him. You don’t know what a young man is who has been for ten years in the hands of a Duchesse de Chaulieu. None but an old woman of sixty could put up with the little ailments of which, they say, the great poet is always complaining,—a habit in Louis XIV. that became a perfectly insupportable annoyance. It is true the duchess does not suffer from it as much as a wife, who would have him always about her.”

Then, practising a well-known manoeuvre peculiar to her sex, Helene d’Herouville repeated in a low voice all the calumnies which women jealous of the Duchesse de Chaulieu were in the habit of spreading about the poet. This little incident, common as it is in the intercourse of women, will serve to show with what fury the hounds were after Modeste’s wealth.

Ten days saw a great change in the opinions at the Chalet as to the three suitors for Mademoiselle de La Bastie’s hand. This change, which was much to the disadvantage of Canalis, came about through considerations of a nature which ought to make the holders of any kind of fame pause, and reflect. No one can deny, if we remember the passion with which people seek for autographs, that public curiosity is greatly excited by celebrity. Evidently most provincials never form an exact idea in their own minds of how illustrious Parisians put on their cravats, walk on the boulevards, stand gaping at nothing, or eat a cutlet; because, no sooner do they perceive a man clothed in the sunbeams of fashion or resplendent with some dignity that is more or less fugitive (though always envied), than they cry out, “Look at that!” “How queer!” and other depreciatory exclamations. In a word, the mysterious charm that attaches to every kind of fame, even that which is most justly due, never lasts. It is, and especially with superficial people who are envious or sarcastic, a sensation which passes off with the rapidity of lightning, and never returns. It would seem as though fame, like the sun, hot and luminous at a distance, is cold as the summit of an alp when you approach it. Perhaps man is only really great to his peers; perhaps the defects inherent in his constitution disappear sooner to the eyes of his equals than to those of vulgar admirers. A poet, if he would please in ordinary life, must put on the fictitious graces of those who are able to make their insignificances forgotten by charming manners and complying speeches. The poet of the faubourg Saint-Germain, who did not choose to bow before this social dictum, was made before long to feel that an insulting provincial indifference had succeeded to the dazed fascination of the earlier evenings. The prodigality of his wit and wisdom had produced upon these worthy souls somewhat the effect which a shopful of glass-ware produces on the eye; in other words, the fire and

brilliancy of Canalis's eloquence soon wearied people who, to use their own words, "cared more for the solid."

Forced after a while to behave like an ordinary man, the poet found an unexpected stumbling-block on ground where La Briere had already won the suffrage of the worthy people who at first had thought him sulky. They felt the need of compensating themselves for Canalis's reputation by preferring his friend. The best of men are influenced by such feelings as these. The simple and straightforward young fellow jarred no one's self-love; coming to know him better they discovered his heart, his modesty, his silent and sure discretion, and his excellent bearing. The Duc d'Herouville considered him, as a political element, far above Canalis. The poet, ill-balanced, ambitious, and restless as Tasso, loved luxury, grandeur, and ran into debt; while the young lawyer, whose character was equable and well-balanced, lived soberly, was useful without proclaiming it, awaited rewards without begging for them, and laid by his money.

Canalis had moreover laid himself open in a special way to the bourgeois eyes that were watching him. For two or three days he had shown signs of impatience; he had given way to depression, to states of melancholy without apparent reason, to those capricious changes of temper which are the natural results of the nervous temperament of poets. These originalities (we use the provincial word) came from the uneasiness that his conduct toward the Duchesse de Chaulieu which grew daily less explainable, caused him. He knew he ought to write to her, but could not resolve on doing so. All these fluctuations were carefully remarked and commented on by the gentle American, and the excellent Madame Latournelle, and they formed the topic of many a discussion between these two ladies and Madame Mignon. Canalis felt the effects of these discussions without being able to explain them. The attention paid to him was not the same, the faces surrounding him no longer wore the entranced look of the earlier days; while at the same time Ernest was evidently gaining ground.

For the last two days the poet had endeavored to fascinate Modeste only, and he took advantage of every moment when he found himself alone with her, to weave the web of passionate language around his love. Modeste's blush, as she listened to him on the occasion we have just mentioned, showed the demoiselles d'Herouville the pleasure with which she was listening to sweet conceits that were sweetly said; and they, horribly uneasy at the sight, had immediate recourse to the "ultima ratio" of women in such cases, namely, those calumnies which seldom miss their object. Accordingly, when the party met at the dinner-table the poet saw a cloud on the brow of his idol; he knew that Mademoiselle

d’Herouville’s malignity allowed him to lose no time, and he resolved to offer himself as a husband at the first moment when he could find himself alone with Modeste.

Overhearing a few acid though polite remarks exchanged between the poet and the two noble ladies, Gobenheim nudged Butscha with his elbow, and said in an undertone, motioning towards the poet and the grand equerry,—

“They’ll demolish one another!”

“Canalis has genius enough to demolish himself all alone,” answered the dwarf.

CHAPTER XXII. A RIDDLE GUESSED

During the dinner, which was magnificent and admirably well served, the duke obtained a signal advantage over Canalis. Modeste, who had received her habit and other equestrian equipments the night before, spoke of taking rides about the country. A turn of the conversation led her to express the wish to see a hunt with hounds, a pleasure she had never yet enjoyed. The duke at once proposed to arrange a hunt in one of the crown forests, which lay a few leagues from Havre. Thanks to his intimacy with the Prince de Cadignan, Master of the Hunt, he saw his chance of displaying an almost regal pomp before Modeste's eyes, and alluring her with a glimpse of court fascinations, to which she could be introduced by marriage. Glances were exchanged between the duke and the two demoiselles d'Herouville, which plainly said, "The heiress is ours!" and the poet, who detected them, and who had nothing but his personal splendors to depend on, determined all the more firmly to obtain some pledge of affection at once. Modeste, on the other hand, half-frightened at being thus pushed beyond her intentions by the d'Herouvilles, walked rather markedly apart with Melchior, when the company adjourned to the park after dinner. With the pardonable curiosity of a young girl, she let him suspect the calumnies which Helene had poured into her ears; but on Canalis's exclamation of anger, she begged him to keep silence about them, which he promised.

"These stabs of the tongue," he said, "are considered fair in the great world. They shock your upright nature; but as for me, I laugh at them; I am even pleased. These ladies must feel that the duke's interests are in great peril, when they have recourse to such warfare."

Making the most of the advantage Modeste had thus given him, Canalis entered upon his defence with such warmth, such eagerness, and with a passion so exquisitely expressed, as he thanked her for a confidence in which he could venture to see the dawn of love, that she found herself suddenly as much compromised with the poet as she feared to be with the grand equerry. Canalis, feeling the necessity of prompt action, declared himself plainly. He uttered vows and protestations in which his poetry shone like a moon, invoked for the occasion, and illuminating his allusions to the beauty of his mistress and the charms of her evening dress. This counterfeit enthusiasm, in which the night, the foliage, the heavens and the earth, and Nature herself played a part, carried the

eager lover beyond all bounds; for he dwelt on his disinterestedness, and revamped in his own charming style, Diderot's famous apostrophe to "Sophie and fifteen hundred francs!" and the well-worn "love in a cottage" of every lover who knows perfectly well the length of the father-in-law's purse.

"Monsieur," said Modeste, after listening with delight to the melody of this concerto; "the freedom granted to me by my parents has allowed me to listen to you; but it is to them that you must address yourself."

"But," exclaimed Canalis, "tell me that if I obtain their consent, you will ask nothing better than to obey them."

"I know beforehand," she replied, "that my father has certain fancies which may wound the proper pride of an old family like yours. He wishes to have his own title and name borne by his grandsons."

"Ah! dear Modeste, what sacrifices would I not make to commit my life to the guardian care of an angel like you."

"You will permit me not to decide in a moment the fate of my whole life," she said, turning to rejoin the demoiselles d'Herouville.

Those noble ladies were just then engaged in flattering the vanity of little Latournelle, intending to win him over to their interests. Mademoiselle d'Herouville, to whom we shall in future confine the family name, to distinguish her from her niece Helene, was giving the notary to understand that the post of judge of the Supreme Court in Havre, which Charles X. would bestow as she desired, was an office worthy of his legal talent and his well-known probity. Butscha, meanwhile, who had been walking about with La Briere, was greatly alarmed at the progress Canalis was evidently making, and he waylaid Modeste at the lower step of the portico when the whole party returned to the house to endure the torments of their inevitable whist.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in a low whisper, "I do hope you don't call him Melchior."

"I'm very near it, my Black Dwarf," she said, with a smile that might have made an angel swear.

"Good God!" exclaimed Butscha, letting fall his hands, which struck the marble steps.

"Well! and isn't he worth more than that spiteful and gloomy secretary in whom you take such an interest?" she retorted, assuming, at the mere thought of Ernest, the haughty manner whose secret belongs exclusively to young girls,—as if their virginity lent them wings to fly to heaven. "Pray, would your little La

Briere accept me without a fortune?" she said, after a pause.

"Ask your father," replied Butscha, who walked a few steps from the house, to get Modeste at a safe distance from the windows. "Listen to me, mademoiselle. You know that he who speaks to you is ready to give not only his life but his honor for you, at any moment, and at all times. Therefore you may believe in him; you can confide to him that which you may not, perhaps, be willing to say to your father. Tell me, has that sublime Canalis been making you the disinterested offer that you now fling as a reproach at poor Ernest?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe it?"

"That question, my manikin," she replied, giving him one of the ten or a dozen nicknames she had invented for him, "strikes me as undervaluing the strength of my self-love."

"Ah, you are laughing, my dear Mademoiselle Modeste; then there's no danger: I hope you are only making a fool of him."

"Pray what would you think of me, Monsieur Butscha, if I allowed myself to make fun of those who do me the honor to wish to marry me? You ought to know, master Jean, that even if a girl affects to despise the most despicable attentions, she is flattered by them."

"Then I flatter you?" said the young man, looking up at her with a face that was illuminated like a city for a festival.

"You?" she said; "you give me the most precious of all friendships,—a feeling as disinterested as that of a mother for her child. Compare yourself to no one; for even my father is obliged to be devoted to me." She paused. "I cannot say that I love you, in the sense which men give to that word, but what I do give you is eternal and can know no change."

"Then," said Butscha, stooping to pick up a pebble that he might kiss the hem of her garment, "suffer me to watch over you as a dragon guards a treasure. The poet was covering you just now with the lace-work of his precious phrases, the tinsel of his promises; he chanted his love on the best strings of his lyre, I know he did. If, as soon as this noble lover finds out how small your fortune is, he makes a sudden change in his behavior, and is cold and embarrassed, will you still marry him? shall you still esteem him?"

"He would be another Francisque Althor," she said, with a gesture of bitter disgust.

"Let me have the pleasure of producing that change of scene," said Butscha.

“Not only shall it be sudden, but I believe I can change it back and make your poet as loving as before,—nay, it is possible to make him blow alternately hot and cold upon your heart, just as gracefully as he has talked on both sides of an argument in one evening without ever finding it out.”

“If you are right,” she said, “who can be trusted?”

“One who truly loves you.”

“The little duke?”

Butscha looked at Modeste. The pair walked some distance in silence; the girl was impenetrable and not an eyelash quivered.

“Mademoiselle, permit me to be the exponent of the thoughts that are lying at the bottom of your heart like sea-mosses under the waves, and which you do not choose to gather up.”

“Eh!” said Modeste, “so my intimate friend and counsellor thinks himself a mirror, does he?”

“No, an echo,” he answered, with a gesture of sublime humility. “The duke loves you, but he loves you too much. If I, a dwarf, have understood the infinite delicacy of your heart, it would be repugnant to you to be worshipped like a saint in her shrine. You are eminently a woman; you neither want a man perpetually at your feet of whom you are eternally sure, nor a selfish egoist like Canalis, who will always prefer himself to you. Why? ah, that I don’t know. But I will make myself a woman, an old woman, and find out the meaning of the plan which I have read in your eyes, and which perhaps is in the heart of every girl. Nevertheless, in your great soul you feel the need of worshipping. When a man is at your knees, you cannot put yourself at his. You can’t advance in that way, as Voltaire might say. The little duke has too many genuflections in his moral being and the poet has too few,—indeed, I might say, none at all. Ha, I have guessed the mischief in your smiles when you talk to the grand equerry, and when he talks to you and you answer him. You would never be unhappy with the duke, and everybody will approve your choice, if you do choose him; but you will never love him. The ice of egotism, and the burning heat of ecstasy both produce indifference in the heart of every woman. It is evident to my mind that no such perpetual worship will give you the infinite delights which you are dreaming of in marriage,—in some marriage where obedience will be your pride, where noble little sacrifices can be made and hidden, where the heart is full of anxieties without a cause, and successes are awaited with eager hope, where each new chance for magnanimity is hailed with joy, where souls are comprehended to their inmost recesses, and where the woman protects with her love the man who

protects her.”

“You are a sorcerer!” exclaimed Modeste.

“Neither will you find that sweet equality of feeling, that continual sharing of each other’s life, that certainty of pleasing which makes marriage tolerable, if you take Canalis,—a man who thinks of himself only, whose ‘I’ is the one string to his lute, whose mind is so fixed on himself that he has hitherto taken no notice of your father or the duke,—a man of second-rate ambitions, to whom your dignity and your devotion will matter nothing, who will make you a mere appendage to his household, and who already insults you by his indifference to your behavior; yes, if you permitted yourself to go so far as to box your mother’s ears Canalis would shut his eyes to it, and deny your crime even to himself, because he thirsts for your money. And so, mademoiselle, when I spoke of the man who truly loves you I was not thinking of the great poet who is nothing but a little comedian, nor of the duke, who might be a good marriage for you, but never a husband—”

“Butscha, my heart is a blank page on which you are yourself writing all that you read there,” cried Modeste, interrupting him. “You are carried away by your provincial hatred for everything that obliges you to look higher than your own head. You can’t forgive a poet for being a statesman, for possessing the gift of speech, for having a noble future before him,—and you calumniate his intentions.”

“His!—mademoiselle, he will turn his back upon you with the baseness of an Althor.”

“Make him play that pretty little comedy, and—”

“That I will! he shall play it through and through within three days,—on Wednesday,—recollect, Wednesday! Until then, mademoiselle, amuse yourself by listening to the little tunes of the lyre, so that the discords and the false notes may come out all the more distinctly.”

Modeste ran gaily back to the salon, where La Briere, who was sitting by the window, where he had doubtless been watching his idol, rose to his feet as if a groom of the chambers had suddenly announced, “The Queen.” It was a movement of spontaneous respect, full of that living eloquence that lies in gesture even more than in speech. Spoken love cannot compare with acts of love; and every young girl of twenty has the wisdom of fifty in applying the axiom. In it lies the great secret of attraction. Instead of looking Modeste in the face, as Canalis who paid her public homage would have done, the neglected lover followed her with a furtive look between his eyelids, humble after the

manner of Butscha, and almost timid. The young heiress observed it, as she took her place by Canalis, to whose game she proceeded to pay attention. During a conversation which ensued, La Briere heard Modeste say to her father that she should ride out for the first time on the following Wednesday; and she also reminded him that she had no whip in keeping with her new equipments. The young man flung a lightning glance at the dwarf, and a few minutes later the two were pacing the terrace.

“It is nine o’clock,” cried Ernest. “I shall start for Paris at full gallop; I can get there to-morrow morning by ten. My dear Butscha, from you she will accept anything, for she is attached to you; let me give her a riding-whip in your name. If you will do me this immense kindness, you shall have not only my friendship but my devotion.”

“Ah, you are very happy,” said Butscha, ruefully; “you have money, you!”

“Tell Canalis not to expect me, and that he must find some pretext to account for my absence.”

An hour later Ernest had ridden out of Havre. He reached Paris in twelve hours, where his first act was to secure a place in the mail-coach for Havre on the following evening. Then he went to three of the chief jewellers in Paris and compared all the whip-handles that they could offer; he was in search of some artistic treasure that was regally superb. He found one at last, made by Stidmann for a Russian, who was unable to pay for it when finished,—a fox-head in gold, with a ruby of exorbitant value; all his savings went into the purchase, the cost of which was seven thousand francs. Ernest gave a drawing of the arms of La Bastie, and allowed the shop-people twenty hours to engrave them. The handle, a masterpiece of delicate workmanship, was fitted to an india-rubber whip and put into a morocco case lined with velvet, on which two M.‘s interlaced were stamped in gold.

La Briere got back to Havre by the mail-coach Wednesday morning in time to breakfast with Canalis. The poet had concealed his secretary’s absence by declaring that he was busy with some work sent from Paris. Butscha, who met La Briere at the coach-door, took the box containing the precious work of art to Francoise Cochet, with instructions to place it on Modeste’s dressing-table.

“Of course you will accompany Mademoiselle Modeste on her ride to-day?” said Butscha, who went to Canalis’s house to let La Briere know by a wink that the whip had gone to its destination.

“I?” answered Ernest; “no, I am going to bed.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Canalis, looking at him. “I don’t know what to make of

you.”

Breakfast was then served, and the poet naturally invited their visitor to stay and take it. Butscha complied, having seen in the expression of the valet’s face the success of a trick in which we shall see the first fruits of his promise to Modeste.

“Monsieur is very right to detain the clerk of Monsieur Latournelle,” whispered Germain in his master’s ear.

Canalis and Germain went into the salon on a sign that passed between them.

“I went out this morning to see the men fish, monsieur,” said the valet,—“an excursion proposed to me by the captain of a smack, whose acquaintance I have made.”

Germain did not acknowledge that he had the bad taste to play billiards in a cafe,—a fact of which Butscha had taken advantage to surround him with friends of his own and manage him as he pleased.

“Well?” said Canalis, “to the point,—quick!”

“Monsieur le baron, I heard a conversation about Monsieur Mignon, which I encouraged as far as I could; for no one, of course, knew that I belong to you. Ah! monsieur, judging by the talk of the quays, you are running your head into a noose. The fortune of Mademoiselle de La Bastie is, like her name, modest. The vessel on which the father returned does not belong to him, but to rich China merchants to whom he renders an account. They even say things that are not at all flattering to Monsieur Mignon’s honor. Having heard that you and Monsieur le duc were rivals for Mademoiselle de La Bastie’s hand, I have taken the liberty to warn you; of the two, wouldn’t it be better that his lordship should gobble her? As I came home I walked round the quays, and into that theatre-hall where the merchants meet; I slipped boldly in and out among them. Seeing a well-dressed stranger, those worthy fellows began to talk to me of Havre, and I got them, little by little, to speak of Colonel Mignon. What they said only confirms the stories the fishermen told me; and I feel that I should fail in my duty if I keep silence. That is why I did not get home in time to dress monsieur this morning.”

“What am I to do?” cried Canalis, who remembered his proposals to Modeste the night before, and did not see how he could get out of them.

“Monsieur knows my attachment to him,” said Germain, perceiving that the poet was quite thrown off his balance; “he will not be surprised if I give him a word of advice. There is that clerk; try to get the truth out of him. Perhaps he’ll unbutton after a bottle or two of champagne, or at any rate a third. It would be strange indeed if monsieur, who will one day be ambassador, as Philoxene has

heard Madame la duchesse say time and time again, couldn’t turn a little notary’s clerk inside out.”

CHAPTER XXIII. BUTSCHA DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

At this instant Butscha, the hidden prompter of the fishing part, was requesting the secretary to say nothing about his trip to Paris, and not to interfere in any way with what he, Butscha, might do. The dwarf had already made use of an unfavorable feeling lately roused against Monsieur Mignon in Havre in consequence of his reserve and his determination to keep silence as to the amount of his fortune. The persons who were most bitter against him even declared calumniously that he had made over a large amount of property to Dumay to save it from the just demands of his associates in China. Butscha took advantage of this state of feeling. He asked the fishermen, who owed him many a good turn, to keep the secret and lend him their tongues. They served him well. The captain of the fishing-smack told Germain that one of his cousins, a sailor, had just returned from Marseilles, where he had been paid off from the brig in which Monsieur Mignon returned to France. The brig had been sold to the account of some other person than Monsieur Mignon, and the cargo was only worth three or four hundred thousand francs at the utmost.

“Germain,” said Canalis, as the valet was leaving the room, “serve champagne and claret. A member of the legal fraternity of Havre must carry away with him proper ideas of a poet’s hospitality. Besides, he has got a wit that is equal to Figaro’s,” added Canalis, laying his hand on the dwarf’s shoulder, “and we must make it foam and sparkle with champagne; you and I, Ernest, will not spare the bottle either. Faith, it is over two years since I’ve been drunk,” he added, looking at La Briere.

“Not drunk with wine, you mean,” said Butscha, looking keenly at him, “yes, I can believe that. You get drunk every day on yourself, you drink in so much praise. Ha, you are handsome, you are a poet, you are famous in your lifetime, you have the gift of an eloquence that is equal to your genius, and you please all women,—even my master’s wife. Admired by the finest sultana-valide that I ever saw in my life (and I never saw but her) you can, if you choose, marry Mademoiselle de La Bastie. Goodness! the mere inventory of your present advantages, not to speak of the future (a noble title, peerage, embassy!), is enough to make me drunk already,—like the men who bottle other men’s wine.”

“All such social distinctions,” said Canalis, “are of little use without the one

thing that gives them value,—wealth. Here we can talk as men with men; fine sentiments only do in verse."

"That depends on circumstances," said the dwarf, with a knowing gesture.

"Ah! you writer of conveyances," said the poet, smiling at the interruption, "you know as well as I do that 'cottage' rhymes with 'pottage,'—and who would like to live on that for the rest of his days?"

At table Butscha played the part of Trigaudin, in the "Maison en loterie," in a way that alarmed Ernest, who did not know the waggery of a lawyer's office, which is quite equal to that of an atelier. Butscha poured forth the scandalous gossip of Havre, the private history of fortune and boudoirs, and the crimes committed code in hand, which are called in Normandy, "getting out of a thing as best you can." He spared no one; and his liveliness increased with the torrents of wine which poured down his throat like rain through a gutter.

"Do you know, La Briere," said Canalis, filling Butscha's glass, "that this fellow would make a capital secretary to the embassy?"

"And oust his chief!" cried the dwarf flinging a look at Canalis whose insolence was lost in the gurgling of carbonic acid gas. "I've little enough gratitude and quite enough scheming to get astride of your shoulders. Ha, ha, a poet carrying a hunchback! that's been seen, often seen—on book-shelves. Come, don't look at me as if I were swallowing swords. My dear great genius, you're a superior man; you know that gratitude is the word of fools; they stick it in the dictionary, but it isn't in the human heart; pledges are worth nothing, except on a certain mount that is neither Pindus nor Parnassus. You think I owe a great deal to my master's wife, who brought me up. Bless you, the whole town has paid her for that in praises, respect, and admiration,—the very best of coin. I don't recognize any service that is only the capital of self-love. Men make a commerce of their services, and gratitude goes down on the debit side,—that's all. As to schemes, they are my divinity. What?" he exclaimed, at a gesture of Canalis, "don't you admire the faculty which enables a wily man to get the better of a man of genius? it takes the closest observation of his vices, and his weaknesses, and the wit to seize the happy moment. Ask diplomacy if its greatest triumphs are not those of craft over force? If I were your secretary, Monsieur le baron, you'd soon be prime-minister, because it would be my interest to have you so. Do you want a specimen of my talents in that line? Well then, listen; you love Mademoiselle Modeste distractedly, and you've good reason to do so. The girl has my fullest esteem; she is a true Parisian. Sometimes we get a few real Parisians born down here in the provinces. Well, Modeste is just the woman to help a man's career. She's got *that* in her," he cried, with a

turn of his wrist in the air. “But you’ve a dangerous competitor in the duke; what will you give me to get him out of Havre within three days?”

“Finish this bottle,” said the poet, refilling Butscha’s glass.

“You’ll make me drunk,” said the dwarf, tossing off his ninth glass of champagne. “Have you a bed where I could sleep it off? My master is as sober as the camel that he is, and Madame Latournelle too. They are brutal enough, both of them, to scold me; and they’d have the rights of it too—there are those deeds I ought to be drawing!—” Then, suddenly returning to his previous ideas, after the fashion of a drunken man, he exclaimed, “and I’ve such a memory; it is on a par with my gratitude.”

“Butscha!” cried the poet, “you said just now you had no gratitude; you contradict yourself.”

“Not at all,” he replied. “To forget a thing means almost always recollecting it. Come, come, do you want me to get rid of the duke? I’m cut out for a secretary.”

“How could you manage it?” said Canalis, delighted to find the conversation taking this turn of its own accord.

“That’s none of your business,” said the dwarf, with a portentous hiccough.

Butscha’s head rolled between his shoulders, and his eyes turned from Germain to La Briere, and from La Briere to Canalis, after the manner of men who, knowing they are tipsy, wish to see what other men are thinking of them; for in the shipwreck of drunkenness it is noticeable that self-love is the last thing that goes to the bottom.

“Ha! my great poet, you’re a pretty good trickster yourself; but you are not deep enough. What do you mean by taking me for one of your own readers,—you who sent your friend to Paris, full gallop, to inquire into the property of the Mignon family? Ha, ha! I hoax, thou hoaxest, we hoax—Good! But do me the honor to believe that I’m deep enough to keep the secrets of my own business. As the head-clerk of a notary, my heart is a locked box, padlocked! My mouth never opens to let out anything about a client. I know all, and I know nothing. Besides, my passion is well known. I love Modeste; she is my pupil, and she must make a good marriage. I’ll fool the duke, if need be; and you shall marry —”

“Germain, coffee and liqueurs,” said Canalis.

“Liqueurs!” repeated Butscha with a wave of his hand, and the air of a sham virgin repelling seduction; “Ah, those poor deeds! one of ‘em was a marriage contract; and that second clerk of mine is as stupid as—as—an epithalamium,

and he’s capable of digging his penknife right through the bride’s paraphernalia; he thinks he’s a handsome man because he’s five feet six,—idiot!”

“Here is some creme de the, a liqueur of the West Indies,” said Canalis. “You, whom Mademoiselle Modeste consults—”

“Yes, she consults me.”

“Well, do you think she loves me?” asked the poet.

“Loves you? yes, more than she loves the duke,” answered the dwarf, rousing himself from a stupor which was admirably played. “She loves you for your disinterestedness. She told me she was ready to make the greatest sacrifices for your sake; to give up dress and spend as little as possible on herself, and devote her life to showing you that in marrying her you hadn’t done so” (hiccough) “bad a thing for yourself. She’s as right as a trivet,—yes, and well informed. She knows everything, that girl.”

“And she has three hundred thousand francs?”

“There may be quite as much as that,” cried the dwarf, enthusiastically. “Papa Mignon,—mignon by name, mignon by nature, and that’s why I respect him,—well, he would rob himself of everything to marry his daughter. Your Restoration” (hiccough) “has taught him how to live on half-pay; he’d be quite content to live with Dumay on next to nothing, if he could rake and scrape enough together to give the little one three hundred thousand francs. But don’t let’s forget that Dumay is going to leave all his money to Modeste. Dumay, you know, is a Breton, and that fact clinches the matter; he won’t go back from his word, and his fortune is equal to the colonel’s. But I don’t approve of Monsieur Mignon’s taking back that villa, and, as they often ask my advice, I told them so. ‘You sink too much in it,’ I said; ‘if Vilquin does not buy it back there’s two hundred thousand francs which won’t bring you a penny; it only leaves you a hundred thousand to get along with, and it isn’t enough.’ The colonel and Dumay are consulting about it now. But nevertheless, between you and me, Modeste is sure to be rich. I hear talk on the quays against it; but that’s all nonsense; people are jealous. Why, there’s no such ‘dot’ in Havre,” cried Butscha, beginning to count on his fingers. “Two to three hundred thousand in ready money,” bending back the thumb of his left hand with the forefinger of his right, “that’s one item; the reversion of the villa Mignon, that’s another; ‘tertio,’ Dumay’s property!” doubling down his middle finger. “Ha! little Modeste may count upon her six hundred thousand francs as soon as the two old soldiers have got their marching orders for eternity.”

This coarse and candid statement, intermingled with a variety of liqueurs,

sobered Canalis as much as it appeared to befuddle Butscha. To the latter, a young provincial, such a fortune must of course seem colossal. He let his head fall into the palm of his right hand, and putting his elbows majestically on the table, blinked his eyes and continued talking to himself:—

“In twenty years, thanks to that Code, which pillages fortunes under what they call ‘Successions,’ an heiress worth a million will be as rare as generosity in a money-lender. Suppose Modeste does want to spend all the interest of her own money,—well, she is so pretty, so sweet and pretty; why she’s—you poets are always after metaphors—she’s a weasel as tricky as a monkey.”

“How came you to tell me she had six millions?” said Canalis to La Briere, in a low voice.

“My friend,” said Ernest, “I do assure you that I was bound to silence by an oath; perhaps, even now, I ought not to say as much as that.”

“Bound! to whom?”

“To Monsieur Mignon.”

“Ernest! you who know how essential fortune is to me—”

Butscha snored.

“—who know my situation, and all that I shall lose in the Duchesse de Chaulieu, by this attempt at marrying, YOU could coldly let me plunge into such a thing as this?” exclaimed Canalis, turning pale. “It was a question of friendship; and ours was a compact entered into long before you ever saw that crafty Mignon.”

“My dear fellow,” said Ernest, “I love Modeste too well to—”

“Fool! then take her,” cried the poet, “and break your oath.”

“Will you promise me on your word of honor to forget what I now tell you, and to behave to me as though this confidence had never been made, whatever happens?”

“I’ll swear that, by my mother’s memory.”

“Well then,” said La Briere, “Monsieur Mignon told me in Paris that he was very far from having the colossal fortune which the Mongenods told me about and which I mentioned to you. The colonel intends to give two hundred thousand francs to his daughter. And now, Melchior, I ask you, was the father really distrustful of us, as you thought; or was he sincere? It is not for me to answer those questions. If Modeste without a fortune deigns to choose me, she will be my wife.”

“A blue-stocking! educated till she is a terror! a girl who has read everything,

who knows everything,—in theory," cried Canalis, hastily, noticing La Briere's gesture, "a spoiled child, brought up in luxury in her childhood, and weaned of it for five years. Ah! my poor friend, take care what you are about."

"Ode and Code," said Butscha, waking up, "you do the ode and I the code; there's only a C's difference between us. Well, now, code comes from 'coda,' a tail,—mark that word! See here! a bit of good advice is worth your wine and your cream of tea. Father Mignon—he's cream, too; the cream of honest men—he is going with his daughter on this riding party; do you go up frankly and talk 'dot' to him. He'll answer plainly, and you'll get at the truth, just as surely as I'm drunk, and you're a great poet,—but no matter for that; we are to leave Havre together, that's settled, isn't it? I'm to be your secretary in place of that little fellow who sits there grinning at me and thinking I'm drunk. Come, let's go, and leave him to marry the girl."

Canalis rose to leave the room to dress for the excursion.

"Hush, not a word,—he is going to commit suicide," whispered Butscha, sober as a judge, to La Briere as he made the gesture of a street boy at Canalis's back. "Adieu, my chief!" he shouted, in stentorian tones, "will you allow me to take a snooze in that kiosk down in the garden?"

"Make yourself at home," answered the poet.

Butscha, pursued by the laughter of the three servants of the establishment, gained the kiosk by walking over the flower-beds and round the vases with the perverse grace of an insect describing its interminable zig-zags as it tries to get out of a closed window. When he had clambered into the kiosk, and the servants had retired, he sat down on a wooden bench and wallowed in the delights of his triumph. He had completely fooled a great man; he had not only torn off his mask, but he had made him untie the strings himself; and he laughed like an author over his own play,—that is to say, with a true sense of the immense value of his "vis comica."

"Men are tops!" he cried, "you've only to find the twine to wind 'em up with. But I'm like my fellows," he added, presently. "I should faint away if any one came and said to me 'Mademoiselle Modeste has been thrown from her horse, and has broken her leg.'"

CHAPTER XXIV. THE POET FEELS THAT HE IS LOVED TOO WELL

An hour later, Modeste, charmingly equipped in a bottle-green cassimere habit, a small hat with a green veil, buckskin gloves, and velvet boots which met the lace frills of her drawers, and mounted on an elegantly caparisoned little horse, was exhibiting to her father and the Duc d'Herouville the beautiful present she had just received; she was evidently delighted with an attention of a kind that particularly flatters women.

"Did it come from you, Monsieur le duc?" she said, holding the sparkling handle toward him. "There was a card with it, saying, 'Guess if you can,' and some asterisks. Francoise and Dumay credit Butscha with this charming surprise; but my dear Butscha is not rich enough to buy such rubies. And as for papa (to whom I said, as I remember, on Sunday evening, that I had no whip), he sent to Rouen for this one,"—pointing to a whip in her father's hand, with a top like a cone of turquoise, a fashion then in vogue which has since become vulgar.

"I would give ten years of my old age, mademoiselle, to have the right to offer you that beautiful jewel," said the duke, courteously.

"Ah, here comes the audacious giver!" cried Modeste, as Canalis rode up. "It is only a poet who knows where to find such choice things. Monsieur," she said to Melchior, "my father will scold you, and say that you justify those who accuse you of extravagance."

"Oh!" exclaimed Canalis, with apparent simplicity, "so that is why La Briere rode at full gallop from Havre to Paris?"

"Does your secretary take such liberties?" said Modeste, turning pale, and throwing the whip to Francoise with an impetuosity that expressed scorn. "Give me your whip, papa."

"Poor Ernest, who lies there on his bed half-dead with fatigue!" said Canalis, overtaking the girl, who had already started at a gallop. "You are pitiless, mademoiselle. 'I have' (the poor fellow said to me) 'only this one chance to remain in her memory.'"

"And should you think well of a woman who could take presents from half the parish?" said Modeste.

She was surprised to receive no answer to this inquiry, and attributed the

poet’s inattention to the noise of the horse’s feet.

“How you delight in tormenting those who love you,” said the duke. “Your nobility of soul and your pride are so inconsistent with your faults that I begin to suspect you calumniate yourself, and do those naughty things on purpose.”

“Ah! have you only just found that out, Monsieur le duc?” she exclaimed, laughing. “You have the sagacity of a husband.”

They rode half a mile in silence. Modeste was a good deal astonished not to receive the fire of the poet’s eyes. The evening before, as she was pointing out to him an admirable effect of setting sunlight across the water, she had said, remarking his inattention, “Well, don’t you see it?”—to which he replied, “I can see only your hand”; but now his admiration for the beauties of nature seemed a little too intense to be natural.

“Does Monsieur de La Briere know how to ride?” she asked, for the purpose of teasing him.

“Not very well, but he gets along,” answered the poet, cold as Gobenheim before the colonel’s return.

At a cross-road, which Monsieur Mignon made them take through a lovely valley to reach a height overlooking the Seine, Canalis let Modeste and the duke pass him, and then reined up to join the colonel.

“Monsieur le comte,” he said, “you are an open-hearted soldier, and I know you will regard my frankness as a title to your esteem. When proposals of marriage, with all their brutal,—or, if you please, too civilized—discussions, are carried on by third parties, it is an injury to all. We are both gentlemen, and both discreet; and you, like myself, have passed beyond the age of surprises. Let us therefore speak as intimates. I will set you the example. I am twenty-nine years old, without landed estates, and full of ambition. Mademoiselle Modeste, as you must have perceived, pleases me extremely. Now, in spite of the little defects which your dear girl likes to assume—”

“—not counting those she really possesses,” said the colonel, smiling,—

“—I should gladly make her my wife, and I believe I could render her happy. The question of money is of the utmost importance to my future, which hangs to-day in the balance. All young girls expect to be loved *whether or no*—fortune or no fortune. But you are not the man to marry your dear Modeste without a ‘dot,’ and my situation does not allow me to make a marriage of what is called love unless with a woman who has a fortune at least equal to mine. I have, from my emoluments and sinecures, from the Academy and from my works, about thirty thousand francs a year, a large income for a bachelor. If my wife brought

me as much more, I should still be in about the same condition that I am now. Shall you give Mademoiselle a million?”

“Ah, monsieur, we have not reached that point as yet,” said the colonel, Jesuitically.

“Then suppose,” said Canalis, quickly, “that we go no further; we will let the matter drop. You shall have no cause to complain of me, Monsieur le comte; the world shall consider me among the unfortunate suitors of your charming daughter. Give me your word of honor to say nothing on the subject to any one, not even to Mademoiselle Modeste, because,” he added, throwing a word of promise to the ear, “my circumstances may so change that I can ask you for her without ‘dot.’”

“I promise you that,” said the colonel. “You know, monsieur, with what assurance the public, both in Paris and the provinces, talk of fortunes that they make and unmake. People exaggerate both happiness and unhappiness; we are never so fortunate nor so unfortunate as people say we are. There is nothing sure and certain in business except investments in land. I am awaiting the accounts of my agents with very great impatience. The sale of my merchandise and my ship, and the settlement of my affairs in China, are not yet concluded; and I cannot know the full amount of my fortune for at least six months. I did, however, say to Monsieur de La Briere in Paris that I would guarantee a ‘dot’ of two hundred thousand francs in ready money. I wish to entail my estates, and enable my grandchildren to inherit my arms and title.”

Canalis did not listen to this statement after the opening sentence. The four riders, having now reached a wider road, went abreast and soon reached a stretch of table-land, from which the eye took in on one side the rich valley of the Seine toward Rouen, and on the other an horizon bounded only by the sea.

“Butscha was right, God is the greatest of all landscape painters,” said Canalis, contemplating the view, which is unique among the many fine scenes that have made the shores of the Seine so justly celebrated.

“Above all do we feel that, my dear baron,” said the duke, “on hunting-days, when nature has a voice, and a lively tumult breaks the silence; at such times the landscape, changing rapidly as we ride through it, seems really sublime.”

“The sun is the inexhaustible palette,” said Modeste, looking at the poet in a species of bewilderment.

A remark that she presently made on his absence of mind gave him an opportunity of saying that he was just then absorbed in his own thoughts,—an excuse that authors have more reason for giving than other men.

“Are we really made happy by carrying our lives into the midst of the world, and swelling them with all sorts of fictitious wants and over-excited vanities?” said Modeste, moved by the aspect of the fertile and billowy country to long for a philosophically tranquil life.

“That is a bucolic, mademoiselle, which is only written on tablets of gold,” said the poet.

“And sometimes under garret-roofs,” remarked the colonel.

Modeste threw a piercing glance at Canalis, which he was unable to sustain; she was conscious of a ringing in her ears, darkness seemed to spread before her, and then she suddenly exclaimed in icy tones:—

“Ah! it is Wednesday!”

“I do not say this to flatter your passing caprice, mademoiselle,” said the duke, to whom the little scene, so tragical for Modeste, had left time for thought; “but I declare I am so profoundly disgusted with the world and the Court and Paris that had I a Duchesse d’Herouville, gifted with the wit and graces of mademoiselle, I would gladly bind myself to live like a philosopher at my chateau, doing good around me, draining my marshes, educating my children—”

“That, Monsieur le duc, will be set to the account of your great goodness,” said Modeste, letting her eyes rest steadily on the noble gentleman. “You flatter me in not thinking me frivolous, and in believing that I have enough resources within myself to be able to live in solitude. It is perhaps my lot,” she added, glancing at Canalis, with an expression of pity.

“It is the lot of all insignificant fortunes,” said the poet. “Paris demands Babylonian splendor. Sometimes I ask myself how I have ever managed to keep it up.”

“The king does that for both of us,” said the duke, candidly; “we live on his Majesty’s bounty. If my family had not been allowed, after the death of Monsieur le Grand, as they call Cinq-Mars, to keep his office among us, we should have been obliged to sell Herouville to the Black Brethren. Ah, believe me, mademoiselle, it is a bitter humiliation to me to have to think of money in marrying.”

The simple honesty of this confession came from his heart, and the regret was so sincere that it touched Modeste.

“In these days,” said the poet, “no man in France, Monsieur le duc, is rich enough to marry a woman for herself, her personal worth, her grace, or her beauty—”

The colonel looked at Canalis with a curious eye, after first watching Modeste, whose face no longer expressed the slightest astonishment.

“For persons of high honor,” he said slowly, “it is a noble employment of wealth to repair the ravages of time and destiny, and restore the old historic families.”

“Yes, papa,” said Modeste, gravely.

The colonel invited the duke and Canalis to dine with him sociably in their riding-dress, promising them to make no change himself. When Modeste went to her room to make her toilette, she looked at the jewelled whip she had disdained in the morning.

“What workmanship they put into such things nowadays!” she said to Francoise Cochet, who had become her waiting-maid.

“That poor young man, mademoiselle, who has got a fever—”

“Who told you that?”

“Monsieur Butscha. He came here this afternoon and asked me to say to you that he hoped you would notice he had kept his word on the appointed day.”

Modeste came down into the salon dressed with royal simplicity.

“My dear father,” she said aloud, taking the colonel by the arm, “please go and ask after Monsieur de La Briere’s health, and take him back his present. You can say that my small means, as well as my natural tastes, forbid my wearing ornaments which are only fit for queens or courtesans. Besides, I can only accept gifts from a bridegroom. Beg him to keep the whip until you know whether you are rich enough to buy it back.”

“My little girl has plenty of good sense,” said the colonel, kissing his daughter on the forehead.

Canalis took advantage of a conversation which began between the duke and Madame Mignon to escape to the terrace, where Modeste joined him, influenced by curiosity, though the poet believed her desire to become Madame de Canalis had brought her there. Rather alarmed at the indecency with which he had just executed what soldiers call a “volte-face,” and which, according to the laws of ambition, every man in his position would have executed quite as brutally, he now endeavored, as the unfortunate Modeste approached him, to find plausible excuses for his conduct.

“Dear Modeste,” he began, in a coaxing tone, “considering the terms on which we stand to each other, shall I displease you if I say that your replies to the Duc d’Herouville were very painful to a man in love,—above all, to a poet whose

soul is feminine, nervous, full of the jealousies of true passion. I should make a poor diplomatist indeed if I had not perceived that your first coquetries, your little premeditated inconsistencies, were only assumed for the purpose of studying our characters—”

Modeste raised her head with the rapid, intelligent, half-coquettish motion of a wild animal, in whom instinct produces such miracles of grace.

“—and therefore when I returned home and thought them over, they never misled me. I only marvelled at a cleverness so in harmony with your character and your countenance. Do not be uneasy, I never doubted that your assumed duplicity covered an angelic candor. No, your mind, your education, have in no way lessened the precious innocence which we demand in a wife. You are indeed a wife for a poet, a diplomatist, a thinker, a man destined to endure the chances and changes of life; and my admiration is equalled only by the attachment I feel to you. I now entreat you—if yesterday you were not playing a little comedy when you accepted the love of a man whose vanity will change to pride if you accept him, one whose defects will become virtues under your divine influence—I entreat you do not excite a passion which, in him, amounts to vice. Jealousy is a noxious element in my soul, and you have revealed to me its strength; it is awful, it destroys everything—Oh! I do not mean the jealousy of an Othello,” he continued, noticing Modeste’s gesture. “No, no; my thoughts were of myself: I have been so indulged on that point. You know the affection to which I owe all the happiness I have ever enjoyed,—very little at the best” (he sadly shook his head). “Love is symbolized among all nations as a child, because it fancies the world belongs to it, and it cannot conceive otherwise. Well, Nature herself set the limit to that sentiment. It was still-born. A tender, maternal soul guessed and calmed the painful constriction of my heart,—for a woman who feels, who knows, that she is past the joys of love becomes angelic in her treatment of others. The duchess has never made me suffer in my sensibilities. For ten years not a word, not a look, that could wound me! I attach more value to words, to thoughts, to looks, than ordinary men. If a look is to me a treasure beyond all price, the slightest doubt is deadly poison; it acts instantaneously, my love dies. I believe—contrary to the mass of men, who delight in trembling, hoping, expecting—that love can only exist in perfect, infantile, and infinite security. The exquisite purgatory, where women delight to send us by their coquetry, is a base happiness to which I will not submit: to me, love is either heaven or hell. If it is hell, I will have none of it. I feel an affinity with the azure skies of Paradise within my soul. I can give myself without reserve, without secrets, doubts or deceptions, in the life to come; and I demand reciprocity. Perhaps I offend you

by these doubts. Remember, however, that I am only talking of myself—”

“—a good deal, but never too much,” said Modeste, offended in every hole and corner of her pride by this discourse, in which the Duchesse de Chaulieu served as a dagger. “I am so accustomed to admire you, my dear poet.”

“Well, then, can you promise me the same canine fidelity which I offer to you? Is it not beautiful? Is it not just what you have longed for?”

“But why, dear poet, do you not marry a deaf-mute, and one who is also something of an idiot? I ask nothing better than to please my husband. But you threaten to take away from a girl the very happiness you so kindly arrange for her; you are tearing away every gesture, every word, every look; you cut the wings of your bird, and then expect it to hover about you. I know poets are accused of inconsistency—oh! very unjustly,” she added, as Canalis made a gesture of denial; “that alleged defect which comes from the brilliant activity of their minds which commonplace people cannot take into account. I do not believe, however, that a man of genius can invent such irreconcilable conditions and call his invention life. You are requiring the impossible solely for the pleasure of putting me in the wrong,—like the enchanters in fairy-tales, who set tasks to persecuted young girls whom the good fairies come and deliver.”

“In this case the good fairy would be true love,” said Canalis in a curt tone, aware that his elaborate excuse for a rupture was seen through by the keen and delicate mind which Butscha had piloted so well.

“My dear poet, you remind me of those fathers who inquire into a girl’s ‘dot’ before they are willing to name that of their son. You are quarrelling with me without knowing whether you have the slightest right to do so. Love is not gained by such dry arguments as yours. The poor duke on the contrary abandons himself to it like my Uncle Toby; with this difference, that I am not the Widow Wadman,—though widow indeed of many illusions as to poetry at the present moment. Ah, yes, we young girls will not believe in anything that disturbs our world of fancy! I was warned of all this beforehand. My dear poet, you are attempting to get up a quarrel which is unworthy of you. I no longer recognize the Melchior of yesterday.”

“Because Melchior has discovered a spirit of ambition in you which—”

Modeste looked at him from head to foot with an imperial eye.

“But I shall be peer of France and ambassador as well as he,” added Canalis.

“Do you take me for a bourgeois,” she said, beginning to mount the steps of the portico; but she instantly turned back and added, “That is less impertinent than to take me for a fool. The change in your conduct comes from certain silly

rumors which you have heard in Havre, and which my maid Francoise has repeated to me."

"Ah, Modeste, how can you think it?" said Canalis, striking a dramatic attitude. "Do you think me capable of marrying you only for your money?"

"If I do you that wrong after your edifying remarks on the banks of the Seine can you easily undeceive me," she said, annihilating him with her scorn.

"Ah!" thought the poet, as he followed her into the house, "if you think, my little girl, that I'm to be caught in that net, you take me to be younger than I am. Dear, dear, what a fuss about an artful little thing whose esteem I value about as much as that of the king of Borneo. But she has given me a good reason for the rupture by accusing me of such unworthy sentiments. Isn't she sly? La Briere will get a burden on his back—idiot that he is! And five years hence it will be a good joke to see them together."

The coldness which this altercation produced between Modeste and Canalis was visible to all eyes that evening. The poet went off early, on the ground of La Briere's illness, leaving the field to the grand equerry. About eleven o'clock Butscha, who had come to walk home with Madame Latournelle, whispered in Modeste's ear, "Was I right?"

"Alas, yes," she said.

"But I hope you have left the door half open, so that he can come back; we agreed upon that, you know."

"Anger got the better of me," said Modeste. "Such meanness sent the blood to my head and I told him what I thought of him."

"Well, so much the better. When you are both so angry that you can't speak civilly to each other I engage to make him desperately in love and so pressing that you will be deceived yourself."

"Come, come, Butscha; he is a great poet; he is a gentleman; he is a man of intellect."

"Your father's eight millions are more to him than all that."

"Eight millions!" exclaimed Modeste.

"My master, who has sold his practice, is going to Provence to attend to the purchase of lands which your father's agent has suggested to him. The sum that is to be paid for the estate of La Bastie is four millions; your father has agreed to it. You are to have a 'dot' of two millions and another million for an establishment in Paris, a hotel and furniture. Now, count up."

"Ah! then I can be Duchesse d'Herouville!" cried Modeste, glancing at

Butscha.

“If it hadn’t been for that comedian of a Canalis you would have kept HIS whip, thinking it came from me,” said the dwarf, indirectly pleading La Briere’s cause.

“Monsieur Butscha, may I ask if I am to marry to please you?” said Modeste, laughing.

“That fine fellow loves you as well as I do,—and you loved him for eight days,” retorted Butscha; “and HE has got a heart.”

“Can he compete, pray, with an office under the Crown? There are but six, grand almoner, chancellor, grand chamberlain, grand master, high constable, grand admiral,—but they don’t appoint high constables any longer.”

“In six months, mademoiselle, the masses—who are made up of wicked Butschas—could send all those grand dignities to the winds. Besides, what signifies nobility in these days? There are not a thousand real noblemen in France. The d’Herouvilles are descended from a tipstaff in the time of Robert of Normandy. You will have to put up with many a vexation from the old aunt with the furrowed face. Look here,—as you are so anxious for the title of duchess,—you belong to the Comtat, and the Pope will certainly think as much of you as he does of all those merchants down there; he’ll sell you a duchy with some name ending in ‘ia’ or ‘agno.’ Don’t play away your happiness for an office under the Crown.”

CHAPTER XXV. A DIPLOMATIC LETTER

The poet’s reflections during the night were thoroughly matter of fact. He sincerely saw nothing worse in life than the situation of a married man without money. Still trembling at the danger he had been led into by his vanity, his desire to get the better of the duke, and his belief in the Mignon millions, he began to ask himself what the duchess must be thinking of his stay in Havre, aggravated by the fact that he had not written to her for fourteen days, whereas in Paris they exchanged four or five letters a week.

“And that poor woman is working hard to get me appointed commander of the Legion and ambassador to the Court of Baden!” he cried.

Thereupon, with that promptitude of decision which results—in poets as well as in speculators—from a lively intuition of the future, he sat down and composed the following letter:—

To Madame la Duchesse de Chaulieu:

My dear Eleonore,—You have doubtless been surprised at not hearing from me; but the stay I am making in this place is not altogether on account of my health. I have been trying to do a good turn to our little friend La Briere. The poor fellow has fallen in love with a certain Mademoiselle Modeste de La Bastie, a rather pale, insignificant, and thread-papery little thing, who, by the way, has the vice of liking literature, and calls herself a poet to excuse the caprices and humors of a rather sullen nature. You know Ernest,—he is so easy to catch that I have been afraid to leave him to himself. Mademoiselle de La Bastie was inclined to coquet with your Melchior, and was only too ready to become your rival, though her arms are thin, and she has no more bust than most girls; moreover, her hair is as dead and colorless as that of Madame de Rochefide, and her eyes small, gray, and very suspicious. I put a stop—perhaps rather brutally—to the attentions of Mademoiselle Immodeste; but love, such as mine for you, demanded it. What care I for all the women on earth, —compared to you, what are they?

The people with whom I pass my time, and who form the circle round the heiress, are so thoroughly bourgeois that they almost turn my stomach. Pity me; imagine! I pass my evenings with notaries, notaresses, cashiers, provincial money-lenders—ah! what a change from my evenings in the rue de Grenelle. The alleged fortune of the father, lately returned from China, has brought to Havre that indefatigable suitor, the grand equerry, hungry after the millions, which he wants, they say, to drain his marshes. The king does not know what a fatal present he made the duke in those waste lands. His Grace, who has not yet found out that the lady had only a small fortune, is jealous of *me*; for La Briere is quietly making progress with his idol under cover of his friend, who serves as a blind.

Notwithstanding Ernest’s romantic ecstasies, I myself, a poet, think chiefly of the essential thing, and I have been making some inquiries which darken the prospects of our friend. If my angel would like absolution for some of our little sins, she will try to find out the facts of the case by sending for Mongenod, the banker, and questioning him, with the dexterity that characterizes her, as to the father’s fortune? Monsieur Mignon, formerly colonel of cavalry in the Imperial guard, has been for the last seven years a correspondent of the Mongenods. It is said that he gives his daughter a “dot” of two hundred thousand francs, and before I make the offer on Ernest’s behalf I am anxious to get the rights of the story. As soon as the affair is arranged I shall return to Paris. I know a way to settle everything to the advantage of our young lover,—simply by the transmission of the father-in-law’s title, and no one, I think, can more readily obtain that favor than Ernest, both on account of his own services and the influence which you and I and the duke can exert for him. With his tastes, Ernest, who of course will step into my office when I go to Baden, will be perfectly happy in Paris with twenty-five thousand francs a year, a permanent place, and a wife—luckless fellow!

Ah, dearest, how I long for the rue de Grenelle! Fifteen days of absence! when they do not kill love, they revive all the ardor of its earlier days, and you know, better than I, perhaps, the reasons that make my love eternal,—my bones will love thee in the grave! Ah! I cannot bear this separation. If I am forced to stay here another ten days, I shall make a flying visit of a few hours to Paris.

Has the duke obtained for me the thing we wanted; and shall you, my dearest life, be ordered to drink the Baden waters next year? The billing and cooing of the “handsome disconsolate,” compared with the accents of our happy love—so true and changeless for now ten years!—have given me a great contempt for marriage. I had never seen the thing so near. Ah, dearest! what the world calls a “false step” brings two beings nearer together than the law—does it not?

The concluding idea served as a text for two pages of reminiscences and aspirations a little too confidential for publication.

The evening before the day on which Canalis put the above epistle into the post, Butscha, under the name of Jean Jacmin, had received a letter from his fictitious cousin, Philoxene, and had mailed his answer, which thus preceded the letter of the poet by about twelve hours. Terribly anxious for the last two weeks, and wounded by Melchior’s silence, the duchess herself dictated Philoxene’s letter to her cousin, and the moment she had read the answer, rather too explicit for her quinquagenary vanity, she sent for the banker and made close inquiries as to the exact fortune of Monsieur Mignon. Finding herself betrayed and abandoned for the millions, Eleonore gave way to a paroxysm of anger, hatred, and cold vindictiveness. Philoxene knocked at the door of the sumptuous room, and entering found her mistress with her eyes full of tears,—so unprecedented a phenomenon in the fifteen years she had waited upon her that the woman stopped short stupefied.

“We expiate the happiness of ten years in ten minutes,” she heard the duchess say.

“A letter from Havre, madame.”

Eleonore read the poet’s prose without noticing the presence of Philoxene, whose amazement became still greater when she saw the dawn of fresh serenity on the duchess’s face as she read further and further into the letter. Hold out a pole no thicker than a walking-stick to a drowning man, and he will think it a high-road of safety. The happy Eleonore believed in Canalis’s good faith when she had read through the four pages in which love and business, falsehood and truth, jostled each other. She who, a few moments earlier, had sent for her husband to prevent Melchior’s appointment while there was still time, was now seized with a spirit of generosity that amounted almost to the sublime.

“Poor fellow!” she thought; “he has not had one faithless thought; he loves me as he did on the first day; he tells me all—Philoxene!” she cried, noticing her maid, who was standing near and pretending to arrange the toilet-table.

“Madame la duchesse?”

“A mirror, child!”

Eleonore looked at herself, saw the fine razor-like lines traced on her brow, which disappeared at a little distance; she sighed, and in that sigh she felt she bade adieu to love. A brave thought came into her mind, a manly thought, outside of all the pettiness of women,—a thought which intoxicates for a moment, and which explains, perhaps, the clemency of the Semiramis of Russia when she married her young and beautiful rival to Momonoff.

“Since he has not been faithless, he shall have the girl and her millions,” she thought,—“provided Mademoiselle Mignon is as ugly as he says she is.”

Three raps, circumspectly given, announced the duke, and his wife went herself to the door to let him in.

“Ah! I see you are better, my dear,” he cried, with the counterfeit joy that courtiers assume so readily, and by which fools are so readily taken in.

“My dear Henri,” she answered, “why is it you have not yet obtained that appointment for Melchior,—you who sacrificed so much to the king in taking a ministry which you knew could only last one year.”

The duke glanced at Philoxene, who showed him by an almost imperceptible sign the letter from Havre on the dressing-table.

“You would be terribly bored at Baden and come back at daggers drawn with Melchior,” said the duke.

“Pray why?”

“Why, you would always be together,” said the former diplomat, with comic good-humor.

“Oh, no,” she said; “I am going to marry him.”

“If we can believe d’Herouville, our dear Canalis stands in no need of your help in that direction,” said the duke, smiling. “Yesterday Grandlieu read me some passages from a letter the grand equerry had written him. No doubt they were dictated by the aunt for the express purpose of their reaching you, for Mademoiselle d’Herouville, always on the scent of a ‘dot,’ knows that Grandlieu and I play whist nearly every evening. That good little d’Herouville wants the Prince de Cadignan to go down and give a royal hunt in Normandy, and endeavor to persuade the king to be present, so as to turn the head of the damozel when she sees herself the object of such a grand affair. In short, two words from Charles X. would settle the matter. D’Herouville says the girl has incomparable beauty—”

“Henri, let us go to Havre!” cried the duchess, interrupting him.

“Under what pretext?” said her husband, gravely; he was one of the confidants of Louis XVIII.

“I never saw a hunt.”

“It would be all very well if the king went; but it is a terrible bore to go so far, and he will not do it; I have just been speaking with him about it.”

“Perhaps *Madame* would go?”

“That would be better,” returned the duke, “I dare say the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse would help you to persuade her from Rosny. If she goes the king will not be displeased at the use of his hunting equipage. Don’t go to Havre, my dear,” added the duke, paternally, “that would be giving yourself away. Come, here’s a better plan, I think. Gaspard’s chateau of Rosembray is on the other side of the forest of Brotonne; why not give him a hint to invite the whole party?”

“He invite them?” said Eleonore.

“I mean, of course, the duchess; she is always engaged in pious works with Mademoiselle d’Herouville; give that old maid a hint, and get her to speak to Gaspard.”

“You are a love of a man,” cried Eleonore; “I’ll write to the old maid and to Diane at once, for we must get hunting things made,—a riding hat is so becoming. Did you win last night at the English embassy?”

“Yes,” said the duke; “I cleared myself.”

“Henri, above all things, stop proceedings about Melchior’s two appointments.”

After writing half a dozen lines to the beautiful Diane de Maufrigneuse, and a short hint to Mademoiselle d’Herouville, Eleonore sent the following answer like the lash of a whip through the poet’s lies.

To Monsieur le Baron de Canalis:—

My dear poet,—Mademoiselle de La Bastie is very beautiful; Mongenod has proved to me that her father has millions. I did think of marrying you to her; I am therefore much displeased at your want of confidence. If you had any intention of marrying La Briere when you went to Havre it is surprising that you said nothing to me about it before you started. And why have you omitted writing to a friend who is so easily made anxious as I? Your letter arrived a trifle late; I had already seen the banker. You are a child, Melchior, and you are playing tricks with us. It is not right. The duke himself is quite indignant at your proceedings; he thinks you less than a gentleman, which casts some reflections on your mother’s honor.

Now, I intend to see things for myself. I shall, I believe, have the honor of accompanying *Madame* to the hunt which the Duc d’Herouville proposes to give for Mademoiselle de La Bastie. I will manage to have you invited to Rosembray, for the meet will probably take place in Duc de Verneuil’s park.

Pray believe, my dear poet, that I am none the less, for life,

Your friend, Eleonore de M.

“There, Ernest, just look at that!” cried Canalis, tossing the letter at Ernest’s nose across the breakfast-table; “that’s the two thousandth love-letter I have had from that woman, and there isn’t even a ‘thou’ in it. The illustrious Eleonore has never compromised herself more than she does there. Marry, and try your luck! The worst marriage in the world is better than this sort of halter. Ah, I am the greatest Nicodemus that ever tumbled out of the moon! Modeste has millions, and I’ve lost her; for we can’t get back from the poles, where we are to-day, to the tropics, where we were three days ago! Well, I am all the more anxious for your triumph over the grand equerry, because I told the duchess I came here only for your sake; and so I shall do my best for you.”

“Alas, Melchior, Modeste must needs have so noble, so grand, so well-balanced a nature to resist the glories of the Court, and all these splendors cleverly displayed for her honor and glory by the duke, that I cannot believe in the existence of such perfection,—and yet, if she is still the Modeste of her letters, there might be hope!”

“Well, well, you are a happy fellow, you young Boniface, to see the world and your mistress through green spectacles!” cried Canalis, marching off to pace up and down the garden.

Caught between two lies, the poet was at a loss what to do.

“Play by rule, and you lose!” he cried presently, sitting down in the kiosk. “Every man of sense would have acted as I did four days ago, and got himself out of the net in which I saw myself. At such times people don’t disentangle nets, they break through them! Come, let us be calm, cold, dignified, affronted. Honor requires it; English stiffness is the only way to win her back. After all, if I have to retire finally, I can always fall back on my old happiness; a fidelity of ten years can’t go unrewarded. Eleonore will arrange me some good marriage.”

CHAPTER XXVI. TRUE LOVE

The hunt was destined to be not only a meet of the hounds, but a meeting of all the passions excited by the colonel's millions and Modeste's beauty; and while it was in prospect there was truce between the adversaries. During the days required for the arrangement of this forestrial solemnity, the salon of the villa Mignon presented the tranquil picture of a united family. Canalis, cut short in his role of injured love by Modeste's quick perceptions, wished to appear courteous; he laid aside his pretensions, gave no further specimens of his oratory, and became, what all men of intellect can be when they renounce affectation, perfectly charming. He talked finances with Gobenheim, and war with the colonel, Germany with Madame Mignon, and housekeeping with Madame Latournelle,—endeavoring to bias them all in favor of La Briere. The Duc d'Herouville left the field to his rivals, for he was obliged to go to Rosembray to consult with the Duc de Verneuil, and see that the orders of the Royal Huntsman, the Prince de Cadignan, were carried out. And yet the comic element was not altogether wanting. Modeste found herself between the depreciatory hints of Canalis as to the gallantry of the grand equerry, and the exaggerations of the two Mesdemoiselles d'Herouville, who passed every evening at the villa. Canalis made Modeste take notice that, instead of being the heroine of the hunt, she would be scarcely noticed. *Madame* would be attended by the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, daughter-in-law of the Prince de Cadignan, by the Duchesse de Chaulieu, and other great ladies of the Court, among whom she could produce no sensation; no doubt the officers in garrison at Rouen would be invited, etc. Helene, on the other hand, was incessantly telling her new friend, whom she already looked upon as a sister-in-law, that she was to be presented to *Madame*; undoubtedly the Duc de Verneuil would invite her father and herself to stay at Rosembray; if the colonel wished to obtain a favor of the king,—a peerage, for instance,—the opportunity was unique, for there was hope of the king himself being present on the third day; she would be delighted with the charming welcome with which the beauties of the Court, the Duchesses de Chaulieu, de Maufrigneuse, de Lenoncourt-Chaulieu, and other ladies, were prepared to meet her. It was in fact an excessively amusing little warfare, with its marches and countermarches and stratagems,—all of which were keenly enjoyed by the Dumays, the Latournelles, Gobenheim, and Butscha, who, in conclave assembled, said horrible things of these noble personages, cruelly noting and

intelligently studying all their little meannesses.

The promises on the d'Herouville side were, however, confirmed by the arrival of an invitation, couched in flattering terms, from the Duc de Verneuil and the Master of the Hunt to Monsieur le Comte de La Bastie and his daughter, to stay at Rosembray and be present at a grand hunt on the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth, of November following.

La Briere, full of dark presentiments, craved the presence of Modeste with an eagerness whose bitter joys are known only to lovers who feel that they are parted, and parted fatally from those they love. Flashes of joy came to him intermingled with melancholy meditations on the one theme, "I have lost her," and made him all the more interesting to those who watched him, because his face and his whole person were in keeping with his profound feeling. There is nothing more poetic than a living elegy, animated by a pair of eyes, walking about, and sighing without rhymes.

The Duc d'Herouville arrived at last to arrange for Modeste's departure; after crossing the Seine she was to be conveyed in the duke's caleche, accompanied by the Demoiselles d'Herouville. The duke was charmingly courteous, he begged Canalis and La Briere to be of the party, assuring them, as he did the colonel, that he had taken particular care that hunters should be provided for them. The colonel invited the three lovers to breakfast on the morning of the start. Canalis then began to put into execution a plan that he had been maturing in his own mind for the last few days; namely, to quietly reconquer Modeste, and throw over the duchess, La Briere, and the duke. A graduate of diplomacy could hardly remain stuck in the position in which he found himself. On the other hand La Briere had come to the resolution of bidding Modeste an eternal farewell. Each suitor was therefore on the watch to slip in a last word, like the defendant's counsel to the court before judgment is pronounced; for all felt that the three weeks' struggle was approaching its conclusion. After dinner on the evening before the start was to be made, the colonel had taken his daughter by the arm and made her feel the necessity of deciding.

"Our position with the d'Herouville family will be quite intolerable at Rosembray," he said to her. "Do you mean to be a duchess?"

"No, father," she answered.

"Then do you love Canalis?"

"No, papa, a thousand times no!" she exclaimed with the impatience of a child.

The colonel looked at her with a sort of joy.

“Ah, I have not influenced you,” cried the true father, “and I will now confess that I chose my son-in-law in Paris when, having made him believe that I had but little fortune, he grasped my hand and told me I took a weight from his mind—”

“Who is it you mean?” asked Modeste, coloring.

“*The man of fixed principles and sound moralities*,” said her father, slyly, repeating the words which had dissolved poor Modeste’s dream on the day after his return.

“I was not even thinking of him, papa. Please leave me at liberty to refuse the duke myself; I understand him, and I know how to soothe him.”

“Then your choice is not made?”

“Not yet; there is another syllable or two in the charade of my destiny still to be guessed; but after I have had a glimpse of court life at Rosembray I will tell you my secret.”

“Ah! Monsieur de La Briere,” cried the colonel, as the young man approached them along the garden path in which they were walking, “I hope you are going to this hunt?”

“No, colonel,” answered Ernest. “I have come to take leave of you and of mademoiselle; I return to Paris—”

“You have no curiosity,” said Modeste, interrupting, and looking at him.

“A wish—that I cannot expect—would suffice to keep me,” he replied.

“If that is all, you must stay to please me; I wish it,” said the colonel, going forward to meet Canalis, and leaving his daughter and La Briere together for a moment.

“Mademoiselle,” said the young man, raising his eyes to hers with the boldness of a man without hope, “I have an entreaty to make to you.”

“To me?”

“Let me carry away with me your forgiveness. My life can never be happy; it must be full of remorse for having lost my happiness—no doubt by my own fault; but, at least,—”

“Before we part forever,” said Modeste, interrupting a la Canalis, and speaking in a voice of some emotion, “I wish to ask you one thing; and though you once disguised yourself, I think you cannot be so base as to deceive me now.”

The taunt made him turn pale, and he cried out, “Oh, you are pitiless!”

“Will you be frank?”

“You have the right to ask me that degrading question,” he said, in a voice weakened by the violent palpitation of his heart.

“Well, then, did you read my letters to Monsieur de Canalis?”

“No, mademoiselle; and I allowed your father to read them it was to justify my love by showing him how it was born, and how sincere my efforts were to cure you of your fancy.”

“But how came the idea of that unworthy masquerade ever to arise?” she said, with a sort of impatience.

La Briere related truthfully the scene in the poet’s study which Modeste’s first letter had occasioned, and the sort of challenge that resulted from his expressing a favorable opinion of a young girl thus led toward a poet’s fame, as a plant seeks its share of the sun.

“You have said enough,” said Modeste, restraining some emotion. “If you have not my heart, monsieur, you have at least my esteem.”

These simple words gave the young man a violent shock; feeling himself stagger, he leaned against a tree, like a man deprived for a moment of reason. Modest, who had left him, turned her head and came hastily back.

“What is the matter?” she asked, taking his hand to prevent him from falling.

“Forgive me—I thought you despised me.”

“But,” she answered, with a distant and disdainful manner, “I did not say that I loved you.”

And she left him again. But this time, in spite of her harshness, La Briere thought he walked on air; the earth softened under his feet, the trees bore flowers; the skies were rosy, the air cerulean, as they are in the temples of Hymen in those fairy pantomimes which finish happily. In such situations every woman is a Janus, and sees behind her without turning round; and thus Modeste perceived on the face of her lover the indubitable symptoms of a love like Butscha’s,—surely the “ne plus ultra” of a woman’s hope. Moreover, the great value which La Briere attached to her opinion filled Modeste with an emotion that was inestimably sweet.

“Mademoiselle,” said Canalis, leaving the colonel and waylaying Modeste, “in spite of the little value you attach to my sentiments, my honor is concerned in effacing a stain under which I have suffered too long. Here is a letter which I received from the Duchesse de Chaulieu five days after my arrival in Havre.”

He let Modeste read the first lines of the letter we have seen, which the duchess began by saying that she had seen Mongenod, and now wished to marry

her poet to Modeste; then he tore that passage from the body of the letter, and placed the fragment in her hand.

“I cannot let you read the rest,” he said, putting the paper in his pocket; “but I confide these few lines to your discretion, so that you may verify the writing. A young girl who could accuse me of ignoble sentiments is quite capable of suspecting some collusion, some trickery. Ah, Modeste,” he said, with tears in his voice, “your poet, the poet of Madame de Chaulieu, has no less poetry in his heart than in his mind. You are about to see the duchess; suspend your judgment of me till then.”

He left Modeste half bewildered.

“Oh, dear!” she said to herself; “it seems they are all angels—and not marriageable; the duke is the only one that belongs to humanity.”

“Mademoiselle Modeste,” said Butscha, appearing with a parcel under his arm, “this hunt makes me very uneasy. I dreamed your horse ran away with you, and I have been to Rouen to see if I could get a Spanish bit which, they tell me, a horse can’t take between his teeth. I entreat you to use it. I have shown it to the colonel, and he has thanked me more than there is any occasion for.”

“Poor, dear Butscha!” cried Modeste, moved to tears by this maternal care.

Butscha went skipping off like a man who has just heard of the death of a rich uncle.

“My dear father,” said Modeste, returning to the salon; “I should like to have that beautiful whip,—suppose you were to ask Monsieur de La Briere to exchange it for your picture by Van Ostade.”

Modeste looked furtively at Ernest, while the colonel made him this proposition, standing before the picture which was the sole thing he possessed in memory of his campaigns, having bought it of a burgher at Rabiston; and she said to herself as La Briere left the room precipitately, “He will be at the hunt.”

A curious thing happened. Modeste’s three lovers each and all went to Rosembray with their hearts full of hope, and captivated by her many perfections.

Rosembray,—an estate lately purchased by the Duc de Verneuil, with the money which fell to him as his share of the thousand millions voted as indemnity for the sale of the lands of the emigres,—is remarkable for its chateau, whose magnificence compares only with that of Mesniere or of Balleroy. This imposing and noble edifice is approached by a wide avenue of four rows of venerable elms, from which the visitor enters an immense rising court-yard, like that at

Versailles, with magnificent iron railings and two lodges, and adorned with rows of large orange-trees in their tubs. Facing this court-yard, the chateau presents, between two fronts of the main building which retreat on either side of this projection, a double row of nineteen tall windows, with carved arches and diamond panes, divided from each other by a series of fluted pilasters surmounted by an entablature which hides an Italian roof, from which rise several stone chimneys masked by carved trophies of arms. Rosembray was built, under Louis XIV., by a “fermier-general” named Cottin. The facade toward the park differs from that on the court-yard by having a narrower projection in the centre, with columns between five windows, above which rises a magnificent pediment. The family of Marigny, to whom the estates of this Cottin were brought in marriage by Mademoiselle Cottin, her father’s sole heiress, ordered a sunrise to be carved on this pediment by Coysevox. Beneath it are two angels unwinding a scroll, on which is cut this motto in honor of the Grand Monarch, “Sol nobis benignus.”

From the portico, reached by two grand circular and balustraded flights of steps, the view extends over an immense fish-pond, as long and wide as the grand canal at Versailles, beginning at the foot of a grass-plot which compares well with the finest English lawns, and bordered with beds and baskets now filled with the brilliant flowers of autumn. On either side of the piece of water two gardens, laid out in the French style, display their squares and long straight paths, like brilliant pages written in the ciphers of Lenotre. These gardens are backed to their whole length by a border of nearly thirty acres of woodland. From the terrace the view is bounded by a forest belonging to Rosembray and contiguous to two other forests, one of which belongs to the Crown, the other to the State. It would be difficult to find a nobler landscape.

CHAPTER XXVII. A GIRL’S REVENGE

Modeste’s arrival at Rosembray made a certain sensation in the avenue when the carriage with the liveries of France came in sight, accompanied by the grand equerry, the colonel, Canalis, and La Briere on horseback, preceded by an outrider in full dress, and followed by six servants,—among whom were the Negroes and the mulatto,—and the britzka of the colonel for the two waiting-women and the luggage. The carriage was drawn by four horses, ridden by postilions dressed with an elegance specially commanded by the grand equerry, who was often better served than the king himself. As Modeste, dazzled by the magnificence of the great lords, entered and beheld this lesser Versailles, she suddenly remembered her approaching interview with the celebrated duchesses, and began to fear that she might seem awkward, or provincial, or parvenue; in fact, she lost her self-possession, and heartily repented having wished for a hunt.

Fortunately, however, as the carriage drew up, Modeste saw an old man, in a blond wig frizzed into little curls, whose calm, plump, smooth face wore a fatherly smile and an expression of monastic cheerfulness which the half-veiled glance of the eye rendered almost noble. This was the Duc de Verneuil, master of Rosembray. The duchess, a woman of extreme piety, the only daughter of a rich and deceased chief-justice, spare and erect, and the mother of four children, resembled Madame Latournelle,—if the imagination can go so far as to adorn the notary’s wife with the graces of a bearing that was truly abbatial.

“Ah, good morning, dear Hortense!” said Mademoiselle d’Herouville, kissing the duchess with the sympathy that united their haughty natures; “let me present to you and to the dear duke our little angel, Mademoiselle de La Bastie.”

“We have heard so much of you, mademoiselle,” said the duchess, “that we were in haste to receive you.”

“And regret the time lost,” added the Duc de Verneuil, with courteous admiration.

“Monsieur le Comte de La Bastie,” said the grand equerry, taking the colonel by the arm and presenting him to the duke and duchess, with an air of respect in his tone and gesture.

“I am glad to welcome you, Monsieur le comte!” said Monsieur de Verneuil. “You possess more than one treasure,” he added, looking at Modeste.

The duchess took Modeste under her arm and led her into an immense salon, where a dozen or more women were grouped about the fireplace. The men of the party remained with the duke on the terrace, except Canalis, who respectfully made his way to the superb Eleonore. The Duchesse de Chaulieu, seated at an embroidery-frame, was showing Mademoiselle de Verneuil how to shade a flower.

If Modeste had run a needle through her finger when handling a pin-cushion she could not have felt a sharper prick than she received from the cold and haughty and contemptuous stare with which Madame de Chaulieu favored her. For an instant she saw nothing but that one woman, and she saw through her. To understand the depths of cruelty to which these charming creatures, whom our passions deify, can go, we must see women with each other. Modeste would have disarmed almost any other than Eleonore by the perfectly stupid and involuntary admiration which her face betrayed. Had she not known the duchess's age she would have thought her a woman of thirty-six; but other and greater astonishments awaited her.

The poet had run plump against a great lady's anger. Such anger is the worst of sphinxes; the face is radiant, all the rest menacing. Kings themselves cannot make the exquisite politeness of a mistress's cold anger capitulate when she guards it with steel armor. Canalis tried to cling to the steel, but his fingers slipped on the polished surface, like his words on the heart; and the gracious face, the gracious words, the gracious bearing of the duchess hid the steel of her wrath, now fallen to twenty-five below zero, from all observers. The appearance of Modeste in her sublime beauty, and dressed as well as Diane de Maufrigneuse herself, had fired the train of gunpowder which reflection had been laying in Eleonore's mind.

All the women had gone to the windows to see the new wonder get out of the royal carriage, attended by her three suitors.

"Do not let us seem so curious," Madame de Chaulieu had said, cut to the heart by Diane's exclamation,—"She is divine! where in the world does she come from?"—and with that the bevy flew back to their seats, resuming their composure, though Eleonore's heart was full of hungry vipers all clamorous for a meal.

Mademoiselle d'Herouville said in a low voice and with much meaning to the Duchesse de Verneuil, "Eleonore receives her Melchior very ungraciously."

"The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse thinks there is a coolness between them," said Laure de Verneuil, with simplicity.

Charming phrase! so often used in the world of society,—how the north wind blows through it.

“Why so?” asked Modeste of the pretty young girl who had lately left the Sacre-Coeur.

“The great poet,” said the pious duchess—making a sign to her daughter to be silent—“left Madame de Chaulieu without a letter for more than two weeks after he went to Havre, having told her that he went there for his health—”

Modeste made a hasty movement, which caught the attention of Laure, Helene, and Mademoiselle d’Herouville.

“—and during that time,” continued the devout duchess, “she was endeavoring to have him appointed commander of the Legion of honor, and minister at Baden.”

“Oh, that was shameful in Canalis; he owes everything to her,” exclaimed Mademoiselle d’Herouville.

“Why did not Madame de Chaulieu come to Havre?” asked Modeste of Helene, innocently.

“My dear,” said the Duchesse de Verneuil, “she would let herself be cut in little pieces without saying a word. Look at her,—she is regal; her head would smile, like Mary Stuart’s, after it was cut off; in fact, she has some of that blood in her veins.”

“Did she not write to him?” asked Modeste.

“Diane tells me,” answered the duchess, prompted by a nudge from Mademoiselle d’Herouville, “that in answer to Canalis’s first letter she made a cutting reply a few days ago.”

This explanation made Modeste blush with shame for the man before her; she longed, not to crush him under her feet, but to revenge herself by one of those malicious acts that are sharper than a dagger’s thrust. She looked haughtily at the Duchesse de Chaulieu—

“Monsieur Melchior!” she said.

All the women snuffed the air and looked alternately at the duchess, who was talking in an undertone to Canalis over the embroidery-frame, and then at the young girl so ill brought up as to disturb a lovers’ meeting,—a thing not permissible in any society. Diane de Maufrigneuse nodded, however, as much as to say, “The child is in the right of it.” All the women ended by smiling at each other; they were enraged with a woman who was fifty-six years old and still handsome enough to put her fingers into the treasury and steal the dues of youth.

Melchior looked at Modeste with feverish impatience, and made the gesture of a master to a valet, while the duchess lowered her head with the movement of a lioness disturbed at a meal; her eyes, fastened on the canvas, emitted red flames in the direction of the poet, which stabbed like epigrams, for each word revealed to her a triple insult.

“Monsieur Melchior!” said Modeste again in a voice that asserted its right to be heard.

“What, mademoiselle?” demanded the poet.

Forced to rise, he remained standing half-way between the embroidery frame, which was near a window, and the fireplace where Modeste was seated with the Duchesse de Verneuil on a sofa. What bitter reflections came into his ambitious mind, as he caught a glance from Eleonore. If he obeyed Modeste all was over, and forever, between himself and his protectress. Not to obey her was to avow his slavery, to lose the chances of his twenty-five days of base manoeuvring, and to disregard the plainest laws of decency and civility. The greater the folly, the more imperatively the duchess exacted it. Modeste’s beauty and money thus pitted against Eleonore’s rights and influence made this hesitation between the man and his honor as terrible to witness as the peril of a matador in the arena. A man seldom feels such palpitations as those which now came near causing Canalis an aneurism, except, perhaps, before the green table, where his fortune or his ruin is about to be decided.

“Mademoiselle d’Herouville hurried me from the carriage, and I left behind me,” said Modeste to Canalis, “my handkerchief—”

Canalis shrugged his shoulders significantly.

“And,” continued Modeste, taking no notice of his gesture, “I had tied into one corner of it the key of a desk which contains the fragment of an important letter; have the kindness, Monsieur Melchior, to get it for me.”

Between an angel and a tiger equally enraged Canalis, who had turned livid, no longer hesitated,—the tiger seemed to him the least dangerous of the two; and he was about to do as he was told, and commit himself irretrievably, when La Briere appeared at the door of the salon, seeming to his anguished mind like the archangel Gabriel tumbling from heaven.

“Ernest, here, Mademoiselle de La Bastie wants you,” said the poet, hastily returning to his chair by the embroidery frame.

Ernest rushed to Modeste without bowing to any one; he saw only her, took his commission with undisguised joy, and darted from the room, with the secret approbation of every woman present.

“What an occupation for a poet!” said Modeste to Helene d’Herouville, glancing toward the embroidery at which the duchess was now working savagely.

“If you speak to her, if you ever look at her, all is over between us,” said the duchess to the poet in a low voice, not at all satisfied with the very doubtful termination which Ernest’s arrival had put to the scene; “and remember, if I am not present, I leave behind me eyes that will watch you.”

So saying, the duchess, a woman of medium height, but a little too stout, like all women over fifty who retain their beauty, rose and walked toward the group which surrounded Diane de Maufrigneuse, stepping daintily on little feet that were as slender and nervous as a deer’s. Beneath her plumpness could be seen the exquisite delicacy of such women, which comes from the vigor of their nervous systems controlling and vitalizing the development of flesh. There is no other way to explain the lightness of her step, and the incomparable nobility of her bearing. None but the women whose quarterings begin with Noah know, as Eleonore did, how to be majestic in spite of a buxom tendency. A philosopher might have pitied Philoxene, while admiring the graceful lines of the bust and the minute care bestowed upon a morning dress, which was worn with the elegance of a queen and the easy grace of a young girl. Her abundant hair, still undyed, was simply wound about her head in plaits; she bared her snowy throat and shoulders, exquisitely modelled, and her celebrated hand and arm, with pardonable pride. Modeste, together with all other antagonists of the duchess, recognized in her a woman of whom they were forced to say, “She eclipses us.” In fact, Eleonore was one of the “grandes dames” now so rare. To endeavor to explain what august quality there was in the carriage of the head, what refinement and delicacy in the curve of the throat, what harmony in her movements, and nobility in her bearing, what grandeur in the perfect accord of details with the whole being, and in the arts, now a second nature, which render a woman grand and even sacred,—to explain all these things would simply be to attempt to analyze the sublime. People enjoy such poetry as they enjoy that of Paganini; they do not explain to themselves the medium, they know the cause is in the spirit that remains invisible.

Madame de Chaulieu bowed her head in salutation of Helene and her aunt; then, saying to Diane, in a pure and equable tone of voice, without a trace of emotion, “Is it not time to dress, duchess?” she made her exit, accompanied by her daughter-in-law and Mademoiselle d’Herouville. As she left the room she spoke in an undertone to the old maid, who pressed her arm, saying, “You are charming,”—which meant, “I am all gratitude for the service you have just done

us.” After that, Mademoiselle d’Herouville returned to the salon to play her part of spy, and her first glance apprised Canalis that the duchess had made him no empty threat. That apprentice in diplomacy became aware that his science was not sufficient for a struggle of this kind, and his wit served him to take a more honest position, if not a worthier one. When Ernest returned, bringing Modeste’s handkerchief, the poet seized his arm and took him out on the terrace.

“My dear friend,” he said, “I am not only the most unfortunate man in the world, but I am also the most ridiculous; and I come to you to get me out of the hornet’s nest into which I have run myself. Modeste is a demon; she sees my difficulty and she laughs at it; she has just spoken to me of a fragment of a letter of Madame de Chaulieu, which I had the folly to give her; if she shows it I can never make my peace with Eleonore. Therefore, will you at once ask Modeste to send me back that paper, and tell her, from me, that I make no pretensions to her hand. Say I count upon her delicacy, upon her propriety as a young girl, to behave to me as if we had never known each other. I beg her not to speak to me; I implore her to treat me harshly,—though I hardly dare ask her to feign a jealous anger, which would help my interests amazingly. Go, I will wait here for an answer.”

CHAPTER XXVIII. MODESTE BEHAVES WITH DIGNITY

On re-entering the salon Ernest de La Briere found a young officer of the company of the guard d'Havre, the Vicomte de Serizy, who had just arrived from Rosny to announce that *Madame* was obliged to be present at the opening of the Chambers. We know the importance then attached to this constitutional solemnity, at which Charles X. delivered his speech, surrounded by the royal family,—Madame la Dauphine and *Madame* being present in their gallery. The choice of the emissary charged with the duty of expressing the princess's regrets was an attention to Diane, who was then an object of adoration to this charming young man, son of a minister of state, gentleman in ordinary of the chamber, only son and heir to an immense fortune. The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse permitted his attentions solely for the purpose of attracting notice to the age of his mother, Madame de Serizy, who was said, in those chronicles that are whispered behind the fans, to have deprived her of the heart of the handsome Lucien de Rubempre.

"You will do us the pleasure, I hope, to remain at Rosembray," said the severe duchess to the young officer.

While giving ear to every scandal, the devout lady shut her eyes to the derelictions of her guests who had been carefully selected by the duke; indeed, it is surprising how much these excellent women will tolerate under pretence of bringing the lost sheep back to the fold by their indulgence.

"We reckoned without our constitutional government," said the grand equerry; "and Rosembray, Madame la duchesse, will lose a great honor."

"We shall be more at our ease," said a tall thin old man, about seventy-five years of age, dressed in blue cloth, and wearing his hunting-cap by permission of the ladies. This personage, who closely resembled the Duc de Bourbon, was no less than the Prince de Cadignan, Master of the Hunt, and one of the last of the great French lords. Just as La Briere was endeavoring to slip behind the sofa and obtain a moment's intercourse with Modeste, a man of thirty-eight, short, fat, and very common in appearance, entered the room.

"My son, the Prince de Loudon," said the Duchesse de Verneuil to Modeste, who could not restrain the expression of amazement that overspread her young

face on seeing the man who bore the historical name that the hero of La Vendee had rendered famous by his bravery and the martyrdom of his death.

“Gaspard,” said the duchess, calling her son to her. The young prince came at once, and his mother continued, motioning to Modeste, “Mademoiselle de La Bastie, my friend.”

The heir presumptive, whose marriage with Desplein’s only daughter had lately been arranged, bowed to the young girl without seeming struck, as his father had been, with her beauty. Modeste was thus enabled to compare the youth of to-day with the old age of a past epoch; for the old Prince de Cadignan had already said a few words which made her feel that he rendered as true a homage to womanhood as to royalty. The Duc de Rhetore, the eldest son of the Duchesse de Chaulieu, chiefly remarkable for manners that were equally impertinent and free and easy, bowed to Modeste rather cavalierly. The reason of this contrast between the fathers and the sons is to be found, probably, in the fact that young men no longer feel themselves great beings, as their forefathers did, and they dispense with the duties of greatness, knowing well that they are now but the shadow of it. The fathers retain the inherent politeness of their vanished grandeur, like the mountain-tops still gilded by the sun when all is twilight in the valley.

Ernest was at last able to slip a word into Modeste’s ear, and she rose immediately.

“My dear,” said the duchesse, thinking she was going to dress, and pulling a bell-rope, “they shall show you your apartment.”

Ernest accompanied Modeste to the foot of the grand staircase, presenting the request of the luckless poet, and endeavoring to touch her feelings by describing Melchior’s agony.

“You see, he loves—he is a captive who thought he could break his chain.”

“Love in such a rapid seeker after fortune!” retorted Modeste.

“Mademoiselle, you are at the entrance of life; you do not know its defiles. The inconsistencies of a man who falls under the dominion of a woman much older than himself should be forgiven, for he is really not accountable. Think how many sacrifices Canalis has made to her. He has sown too much seed of that kind to resign the harvest; the duchess represents to him ten years of devotion and happiness. You made him forget all that, and unfortunately, he has more vanity than pride; he did not reflect on what he was losing until he met Madame Chaulieu here to-day. If you really understood him, you would help him. He is a child, always mismanaging his life. You call him a seeker after fortune, but he

seeks very badly; like all poets, he is a victim of sensations; he is childish, easily dazzled like a child by anything that shines, and pursuing its glitter. He used to love horses and pictures, and he craved fame,—well, he sold his pictures to buy armor and old furniture of the Renaissance and Louis XV.; just now he is seeking political power. Admit that his hobbies are noble things."

"You have said enough," replied Modeste; "come," she added, seeing her father, whom she called with a motion of her head to give her his arm; "come with me, and I will give you that scrap of paper; you shall carry it to the great man and assure him of my condescension to his wishes, but on one condition,—you must thank him in my name for the pleasure I have taken in seeing one of the finest of the German plays performed in my honor. I have learned that Goethe's masterpiece is neither Faust nor Egmont—" and then, as Ernest looked at the malicious girl with a puzzled air, she added: "It is Torquato Tasso! Tell Monsieur de Canalis to re-read it," she added smiling; "I particularly desire that you will repeat to your friend word for word what I say; for it is not an epigram, it is the justification of his conduct,—with this trifling difference, that he will, I trust, become more and more reasonable, thanks to the folly of his Eleonore."

The duchess's head-woman conducted Modeste and her father to their apartment, where Francoise Cochet had already put everything in order, and the choice elegance of which astounded the colonel, more especially after he heard from Francoise that there were thirty other apartments in the chateau decorated with the same taste.

"This is what I call a proper country-house," said Modeste.

"The Comte de La Bastie must build you one like it," replied her father.

"Here, monsieur," said Modeste, giving the bit of paper to Ernest; "carry it to our friend and put him out of his misery."

The word *our* friend struck the young man's heart. He looked at Modeste to see if there was anything real in the community of interests which she seemed to admit, and she, understanding perfectly what his look meant, added, "Come, go at once, your friend is waiting."

La Briere colored excessively, and left the room in a state of doubt and anxiety less endurable than despair. The path that approaches happiness is, to the true lover, like the narrow way which Catholic poetry has called the entrance to Paradise,—expressing thus a dark and gloomy passage, echoing with the last cries of earthly anguish.

An hour later this illustrious company were all assembled in the salon; some were playing whist, others conversing; the women had their embroideries in

hand, and all were waiting the announcement of dinner. The Prince de Cadignan was drawing Monsieur Mignon out upon China, and his campaigns under the empire, and making him talk about the Portendueres, the L'Estorades, and the Maucombes, Provencal families; he blamed him for not seeking service, and assured him that nothing would be easier than to restore him to his rank as colonel of the Guard.

"A man of your birth and your fortune ought not to belong to the present Opposition," said the prince, smiling.

This society of distinguished persons not only pleased Modeste, but it enabled her to acquire, during her stay, a perfection of manners which without this revelation she would have lacked all her life. Show a clock to an embryo mechanic, and you reveal to him the whole mechanism; he thus develops the germs of his faculty which lie dormant within him. In like manner Modeste had the instinct to appropriate the distinctive qualities of Madame de Maufrigneuse and Madame de Chaulieu. For her, the sight of these women was an education; whereas a bourgeois would merely have ridiculed their ways or made them absurd by clumsy imitation. A well-born, well-educated, and right-minded young woman like Modeste fell naturally into connection with these people, and saw at once the differences that separate the aristocratic world from the bourgeois world, the provinces from the faubourg Saint-Germain; she caught the almost imperceptible shadings; in short, she perceived the grace of the "grande dame" without doubting that she could herself acquire it. She noticed also that her father and La Briere appeared infinitely better in this Olympus than Canalis. The great poet, abdicating his real and incontestable power, that of the mind, became nothing more than a courtier seeking a ministry, intriguing for an order, and forced to please the whole galaxy. Ernest de La Briere, without ambitions, was able to be himself; while Melchior became, to use a vulgar expression, a mere toady, and courted the Prince de Loudon, the Duc de Rhetore, the Vicomte de Serizy, or the Duc de Maufrigneuse, like a man not free to assert himself, as did Colonel Mignon, who was justly proud of his campaigns, and of the confidence of the Emperor Napoleon. Modeste took note of the strained efforts of the man of real talent, seeking some witticism that should raise a laugh, some clever speech, some compliment with which to flatter these grand personages, whom it was his interest to please. In a word, to Modeste's eyes the peacock plucked out his tail-feathers.

Toward the middle of the evening the young girl sat down with the grand equerry in a corner of the salon. She led him there purposely to end a suit which she could no longer encourage if she wished to retain her self-respect.

“Monsieur le duc, if you really knew me,” she said, “you would understand how deeply I am touched by your attentions. It is because of the profound respect I feel for your character, and the friendship which a soul like yours inspires in mine, that I cannot endure to wound your self-love. Before your arrival in Havre I loved sincerely, deeply, and forever, one who is worthy of being loved, and my affection for whom is still a secret; but I wish you to know —and in saying this I am more sincere than most young girls—that had I not already formed this voluntary attachment, you would have been my choice, for I recognize your noble and beautiful qualities. A few words which your aunt and sister have said to me as to your intentions lead me to make this frank avowal. If you think it desirable, a letter from my mother shall recall me, on pretence of her illness, to-morrow morning before the hunt begins. Without your consent I do not choose to be present at a fete which I owe to your kindness, and where, if my secret should escape me, you might feel hurt and defrauded. You will ask me why I have come here at all. I could not withstand the invitation. Be generous enough not to reproach me for what was almost a necessary curiosity. But this is not the chief, not the most delicate thing I have to say to you. You have firm friends in my father and myself,—more so than perhaps you realize; and as my fortune was the first cause that brought you to me, I wish to say—but without intending to use it as a sedative to calm the grief which gallantry requires you to testify—that my father has thought over the affair of the marshes, his friend Dumay thinks your project feasible, and they have already taken steps to form a company. Gobenheim, Dumay, and my father have subscribed fifteen hundred thousand francs, and undertake to get the rest from capitalists, who will feel it in their interest to take up the matter. If I have not the honor of becoming the Duchesse d’Herouville, I have almost the certainty of enabling you to choose her, free from all trammels in your choice, and in a higher sphere than mine. Oh! let me finish,” she cried, at a gesture from the duke.

“Judging by my nephew’s emotion,” whispered Mademoiselle d’Herouville to her niece, “it is easy to see you have a sister.”

“Monsieur le duc, all this was settled in my mind the day of our first ride, when I heard you deplore your situation. This is what I have wished to say to you. That day determined my future life. Though you did not make the conquest of a woman, you have at least gained faithful friends at Ingouville—if you will deign to accord us that title.”

This little discourse, which Modeste had carefully thought over, was said with so much charm of soul that the tears came to the grand equerry’s eyes; he seized her hand and kissed it.

“Stay during the hunt,” he said; “my want of merit has accustomed me to these refusals; but while accepting your friendship and that of the colonel, you must let me satisfy myself by the judgment of competent scientific men, that the draining of those marshes will be no risk to the company you speak of, before I agree to the generous offer of your friends. You are a noble girl, and though my heart aches to think I can only be your friend, I will glory in that title, and prove it to you at all times and in all seasons.”

“In that case, Monsieur le duc, let us keep our secret. My choice will not be known, at least I think not, until after my mother’s complete recovery. I should like our first blessing to come from her eyes.”

CHAPTER XXIX. CONCLUSION

“Ladies,” said the Prince de Cadignan, as the guests were about to separate for the night, “I know that several of you propose to follow the hounds with us to-morrow, and it becomes my duty to tell you that if you will be Dianas you must rise, like Diana, with the dawn. The meet is for half-past eight o’clock. I have in the course of my life seen many women display greater courage than men, but for a few seconds only; and you will need a strong dose of resolution to keep you on horseback the whole day, barring a halt for breakfast, which we shall take, like true hunters and huntresses, on the nail. Are you still determined to show yourselves trained horse-women?”

“Prince, it is necessary for me to do so,” said Modeste, adroitly.

“I answer for myself,” said the Duchesse de Chaulieu.

“And I for my daughter Diane; she is worthy of her name,” added the prince. “So, then, you all persist in your intentions? However, I shall arrange, for the sake of Madame and Mademoiselle de Verneuil and others of the party who stay at home, to drive the stag to the further end of the pond.”

“Make yourself quite easy, mesdames,” said the Prince de Loudon, when the Royal Huntsman had left the room; “that breakfast ‘on the nail’ will take place under a comfortable tent.”

The next day, at dawn, all signs gave promise of a glorious day. The skies, veiled by a slight gray vapor, showed spaces of purest blue, and would surely be swept clear before mid-day by the northwest wind, which was already playing with the fleecy cloudlets. As the hunting party left the chateau, the Master of the Hunt, the Duc de Rhetore, and the Prince de Loudon, who had no ladies to escort, rode in the advance, noticing the white masses of the chateau, with its rising chimneys relieved against the brilliant red-brown foliage which the trees in Normandy put on at the close of a fine autumn.

“The ladies are fortunate in their weather,” remarked the Duc de Rhetore.

“Oh, in spite of all their boasting,” replied the Prince de Cadignan, “I think they will let us hunt without them!”

“So they might, if each had not a squire,” said the duke.

At this moment the attention of these determined huntsmen—for the Prince de Loudon and the Duc de Rhetore are of the race of Nimrod, and the best shots of

the faubourg Saint-Germain—was attracted by a loud altercation; and they spurred their horses to an open space at the entrance to the forest of Rosembray, famous for its mossy turf, which was appointed for the meet. The cause of the quarrel was soon apparent. The Prince de Loudon, afflicted with anglomania, had brought out his own hunting establishment, which was exclusively Britannic, and placed it under orders of the Master of the Hunt. Now, one of his men, a little Englishman,—fair, pale, insolent, and phlegmatic, scarcely able to speak a word of French, and dressed with a neatness which distinguishes all Britons, even those of the lower classes,—had posted himself on one side of this open space. John Barry wore a short frock-coat, buttoned tightly at the waist, made of scarlet cloth, with buttons bearing the De Verneuil arms, white leather breeches, top-boots, a striped waistcoat, and a collar and cape of black velvet. He held in his hand a small hunting-whip, and hanging to his wrist by a silken cord was a brass horn. This man, the first whipper-in, was accompanied by two thorough-bred dogs,—fox-hounds, white, with liver spots, long in the leg, fine in the muzzle, with slender heads, and little ears at their crests. The huntsman—famous in the English county from which the Prince de Loudon had obtained him at great cost—was in charge of an establishment of fifteen horses and sixty English hounds, which cost the Duc de Verneuil, who was nothing of a huntsman, but chose to indulge his son in this essentially royal taste, an enormous sum of money to keep up.

Now, when John arrived on the ground, he found himself forestalled by three other whippers-in, in charge of two of the royal packs of hounds which had been brought there in carts. They were the three best huntsmen of the Prince de Cadignan, and presented, both in character and in their distinctively French costume, a marked contrast to the representative of insolent Albion. These favorites of the Prince, each wearing full-brimmed, three-cornered hats, very flat and very wide-spreading, beneath which grinned their swarthy, tanned, and wrinkled faces, lighted by three pairs of twinkling eyes, were noticeably lean, sinewy, and vigorous, like men in whom sport had become a passion. All three were supplied with immense horns of Dampierre, wound with green worsted cords, leaving only the brass tubes visible; but they controlled their dogs by the eye and voice. Those noble animals were far more faithful and submissive subjects than the human lieges whom the king was at that moment addressing; all were marked with white, black, or liver spots, each having as distinctive a countenance as the soldiers of Napoleon, their eyes flashing like diamonds at the slightest noise. One of them, brought from Poitou, was short in the back, deep in the shoulder, low-jointed, and lop-eared; the other, from England, white, fine as

a greyhound with no belly, small ears, and built for running. Both were young, impatient, and yelping eagerly, while the old hounds, on the contrary, covered with scars, lay quietly with their heads on their forepaws, and their ears to the earth like savages.

As the Englishman came up, the royal dogs and huntsmen looked at each other as though they said, “If we cannot hunt by ourselves his Majesty’s service is insulted.”

Beginning with jests, the quarrel presently grew fiercer between Monsieur Jacquin La Roulie, the old French whipper-in, and John Barry, the young islander. The two princes guessed from afar the subject of the altercation, and the Master of the Hunt, setting spurs to his horse, brought it to an end by saying, in a voice of authority:—

“Who drew the wood?”

“I, monseigneur,” said the Englishman.

“Very good,” said the Prince de Cadignan, proceeding to take Barry’s report.

Dogs and men became silent and respectful before the Royal Huntsman, as though each recognized his dignity as supreme. The prince laid out the day’s work; for it is with a hunt as it is with a battle, and the Master of Charles X.‘s hounds was the Napoleon of forests. Thanks to the admirable system which he has introduced into French venery, he was able to turn his thoughts exclusively to the science and strategy of it. He now quietly assigned a special duty to the Prince de Loudon’s establishment, that of driving the stag to water, when, as he expected, the royal hounds had sent it into the Crown forest which outlined the horizon directly in front of the chateau. The prince knew well how to soothe the self-love of his old huntsmen by giving them the most arduous part of the work, and also that of the Englishman, whom he employed at his own speciality, affording him a chance to show the fleetness of his horses and dogs in the open. The two national systems were thus face to face and allowed to do their best under each other’s eyes.

“Does monseigneur wish us to wait any longer?” said La Roulie, respectfully.

“I know what you mean, old friend,” said the prince. “It is late, but—”

“Here come the ladies,” said the second whipper-in.

At that moment the cavalcade of sixteen riders was seen to approach at the head of which were the green veils of the four ladies. Modeste, accompanied by her father, the grand equerry, and La Briere, was in the advance, beside the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse whom the Vicomte de Serizy escorted. Behind them

rode the Duchesse de Chaulieu, flanked by Canalis, on whom she was smiling without a trace of rancor. When they had reached the open space where the huntsmen with their red coats and brass bugles, surrounded by the hounds, made a picture worthy of Van der Meulen, the Duchesse de Chaulieu, who, in spite of her embonpoint, sat her horse admirably, rode up to Modeste, finding it more for her dignity not to avoid that young person, to whom the evening before she had not said a single word.

When the Master of the Hunt finished his compliments to the ladies on their amazing punctuality, Eleonore deigned to observe the magnificent whip which sparked in Modeste's little hand, and graciously asked leave to look at it.

"I have never seen anything of the kind more beautiful," she said, showing it to Diane de Maufrigneuse. "It is in keeping with its possessor," she added, returning it to Modeste.

"You must admit, Madame la duchesse," answered Mademoiselle de La Bastie, with a tender and malicious glance at La Briere, "that it is a rather strange gift from the hand of a future husband."

"I should take it," said Madame de Maufrigneuse, "as a declaration of my rights, in remembrance of Louis XIV."

La Briere's eyes were suffused, and for a moment he dropped his reins; but a second glance from Modeste ordered him not to betray his happiness. The hunt now began.

The Duc d'Herouville took occasion to say in a low voice to his fortunate rival; "Monsieur, I hope that you will make your wife happy; if I can be useful to you in any way, command my services; I should be only too glad to contribute to the happiness of so charming a pair."

This great day, in which such vast interests of heart and fortune were decided, caused but one anxiety to the Master of the Hunt,—namely, whether or not the stag would cross the pond and be killed on the lawn before the house; for huntsmen of his calibre are like great chess-players who can predict a checkmate under certain circumstances. The happy old man succeeded to the height of his wishes; the run was magnificent, and the ladies released him from his attendance upon them for the hunt of the next day but one,—which, however, turned out to be rainy.

The Duc de Verneuil's guests stayed five days at Rosembray. On the last day the Gazette de France announced the appointment of Monsieur le Baron de Canalis to the rank of commander of the Legion of honor, and to the post of minister at Carlsruhe.

When, early in the month of December, Madame de La Bastie, operated upon by Desplein, recovered her sight and saw Ernest de La Briere for the first time, she pressed Modeste's hand and whispered in her ear, "I should have chosen him myself."

Toward the last of February all the deeds for the estates in Provence were signed by Latournelle, and about that time the family of La Bastie obtained the marked honor of the king's signature to the marriage contract and to the ordinance transmitting their title and arms to La Briere, who henceforth took the name of La Briere-La Bastie. The estate of La Bastie was entailed by letters-patent issued about the end of April. La Briere's witnesses on the occasion of his marriage were Canalis and the minister whom he had served for five years as secretary. Those of the bride were the Duc d'Herouville and Desplein, whom the Mignons long held in grateful remembrance, after giving him magnificent and substantial proofs of their regard.

Later, in the course of this long history of our manners and customs, we may again meet Monsieur and Madame de La Briere-La Bastie; and those who have the eyes to see, will then behold how sweet, how easy, is the marriage yoke with an educated and intelligent woman; for Modeste, who had the wit to avoid the follies of pedantry, is the pride and happiness of her husband, as she is of her family and of all those who surround her.

ADDENDUM

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

Beaupre, Fanny A Start in Life
  The Muse of the Department
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
Bixiou, Jean-Jacques The Purse
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  The Government Clerks
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  The Firm of Nucingen
  The Muse of the Department
  Cousin Betty
  The Member for Arcis
  Beatrix
  A Man of Business
  Gaudissart II.
  The Unconscious Humorists
  Cousin Pons
Blondet, Emile Jealousies of a Country Town
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  Another Study of Woman
  The Secrets of a Princess
  A Daughter of Eve
  The Firm of Nucingen
  The Peasantry
Bridau, Joseph The Purse
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  A Start in Life
  Another Study of Woman
  Pierre Grassou
  Letters of Two Brides
  Cousin Betty
  The Member for Arcis

Cadignan, Prince de The Secrets of a Princess

Canalis, Constant-Cyr-Melchior, Baron de Letters of Two Brides
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  The Magic Skin
  Another Study of Woman
  A Start in Life
  Beatrix
  The Unconscious Humorists
  The Member for Arcis

Chatillonest, De A Woman of Thirty

Chaulieu, Henri, Duc de Letters of Two Brides
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  The Thirteen
Dauriat A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
Desplein The Atheist’s Mass
  Cousin Pons
  Lost Illusions
  The Thirteen
  The Government Clerks
  Pierrette
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  The Seamy Side of History
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  Honorine
Estourny, Charles d’ Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  A Man of Business
Fontaine, Comte de The Chouans
  The Ball at Sceaux
  Cesar Birotteau
  The Government Clerks
Grandlieu, Duc Ferdinand de The Gondreville Mystery
  The Thirteen
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
Herouville, Duc d’ The Hated Son
  Jealousies of a Country Town
  Cousin Betty

La Bastie la Briere, Ernest de The Government Clerks

La Bastie la Briere, Madame Ernest de (Modeste) The Member for Arcis
  Cousin Betty

Loudon, Prince de The Chouans

Marsay, Henri de The Thirteen
  The Unconscious Humorists
  Another Study of Woman
  The Lily of the Valley
  Father Goriot
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  Ursule Mirouet
  A Marriage Settlement
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Maufrigneuse, Duchesse de The Secrets of a Princess
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  The Member for Arcis
Nucingen, Baronne Delphine de Father Goriot
  The Thirteen
  Eugenie Grandet
  Cesar Birotteau
  Melmoth Reconciled
  Lost Illusions
  A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
  The Commission in Lunacy
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
  The Firm of Nucingen

  Another Study of Woman
  A Daughter of Eve
  The Member for Arcis
Schinner, Hippolyte The Purse
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  Pierre Grassou
  A Start in Life
  Albert Savarus
  The Government Clerks
  The Imaginary Mistress
  The Unconscious Humorists
Serizy, Comte Hugret de A Start in Life
  A Bachelor’s Establishment
  Honorine
  Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life
Serizy, Vicomte de A Start in Life
  The Imaginary Mistress
Sommervieux, Theodore de At the Sign of the Cat and Racket
  The Government Clerks
Stidmann Beatrix
  The Member for Arcis
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