

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC

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NOTE

HONORÉ DE BALZAC was born at Tours May 16, 1799. His father had been a barrister before the Revolution, but at the time of Honoré's birth held a post in the Commissariat. His mother was much younger than his father, and survived her son. The novelist was the eldest of a family of four, two sisters being born after him and then a younger brother.

At the age of seven he was sent to the Oratorian Grammar School at Vendôme, where he stayed for seven years, without making any reputation for himself in the ordinary school course.

Leaving Tours towards the end of 1814, the Balzacs removed to Paris, where Honoré was sent to private schools and tutors until he had 'finished his classes' in 1816. Then he attended lectures at the Sorbonne, and, being destined by his father for the law, he went through the necessary lectures and examinations, attending the offices of an attorney and a notary for three years.

Then a notary, a friend of his father, offered to Honoré a place in his office, with a prospect of succeeding him in the business on very favourable terms. As against this, however, Balzac protested he would be a man of letters and nothing else. His protest was successful, but only in a qualified way, for although he was allowed to follow his own bent, it was in solitude and with meagre supplies that he did so. His family had left Paris at about this time, and he remained in a sparsely furnished garret with an old woman to look after him. For ten years this period of probation lasted, although he did not remain in the garret the whole of this time.

We know, in detail, very little of him during this period. There are a good many of his letters during the first three years (1819-22) to his elder sister, Laure, who was his first confidante, and later his only authoritative biographer. Between 1822 and 1829, when he first made his mark, there are very few of his letters. What concerns us most is that in these ten years he wrote very numerous novels, though only ten of them were ever reprinted in the *Comédiq*

Humaine, and these all omitted by him in his later arrangements of that stupendous series. He gained little by his writings during these years except experience, though he speaks of receiving sums of sixty, eighty, and one hundred pounds for some of them. One other thing, however, he learnt, which lasted him his life, but never did him the least good; this was the love of speculation. Amongst other businesses by which he thought to make money was that of publishing, and afterwards printing and typefounding.

It was with *Les Chouans* that Balzac made his first distinct success, and in the three years following 1829, besides doing much journalistic and other literary work, he published the following: *La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote*, the *Peau de Chagrin*, most of the short *Contes Philosophiques*, and many other stories, chiefly included in the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*. It cannot be said that he ever mixed much in society; it was impossible that he should do so, considering the vast amount of work he did and the manner in which he did it. His practice was to dine lightly about five or six; next to go to bed and sleep till eleven, twelve, or one; and then get up, and with the help only of enormous quantities of very strong coffee, to work for indefinite stretches of time into the morning or afternoon of the next day, often for sixteen hours at a time. The first draft of his work never presented it in anything like fulness, sometimes not amounting to more than a quarter of its final bulk, then, upon 'slip' proof with broad margins, he would almost rewrite it, making excisions, alterations, and, most of all, additions.

There is really very little biographical detail to be stated. On the 14th March 1850 he was married at Vierzschovnia, in the Ukraine, to Madame Hanska, born Countess Rzevuska, for whom he had waited nearly, if not quite fourteen years, and returned to Paris at the end of May, dying in his house, in the Rue Fortunée, on the 18th August the same year.

The present volume is a reprint of the translation made by Miss Ellen Marriage for the edition of the *Comédies Humaine*, in 40 uniform volumes, edited, with a general introduction, by Professor Saintsbury. This edition contains all that is most significant of Balzac's work, and the following is a list, as arranged by the author, of its component novels and stories:—

Scènes de la Vie Privée.

- AT THE SIGN OF THE CAT AND RACKET, Etc. (La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote. Le Bal de Sceaux. La Bourse. La Vendetta. Mme. Firmiani).
 LA GRANDE BRÊTÊCHE, Etc. (La Grande Brêtêche. La Paix du Ménage. La Fausse Maîtresse. Étude de femme. Autre étude de femme. Albert Savarus). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 A DAUGHTER OF ÈVZ (Une Fille d'Èvc. Mémoires de deux Jeunes Mariées). Translated by Mrs. R. S. Scott.
 A WOMAN OF THIRTY, Etc. (La Femme de Trente Ans. La Femme abandonnée. La Grenadière. Le Message. Gobseck). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
 A MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT (Le Contrat de Mariage. Un Début dans la Vie. Une Double Famille).
 MODESTE MIGNON (Modeste Mignon). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 BÉATRIX (Béatrix). Translated by James Waring.
 THE ATHEIST'S MASS, Etc. (La Messe de l'Athée. Honorine. Le Colonel Chabert. L'Interdiction. Pierre Grassou). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

Scènes de la Vie de Province.

- URSULE MIROUËT (Ursule Mirouët). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 EUGÉNIE GRANDET (Eugénie Grandet). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
 PIERRETTE AND THE ABBÉ BIROTTEAU (Les Célibataires—I. Pierrette. Le Curé de Tours). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 A BACHELOR'S ESTABLISHMENT (Les Célibataires—II. Un Ménage de garçon). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
 PARISIANS IN THE COUNTRY (Les Parisiens en Province. L'illustre Gaudissart. La Muse du département).
 THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN (Les Rivalités. La Vieille Fille. Le Cabinet des Antiques).
 THE LILY OF THE VALLEY (Le Lys dans la Vallée). Translated by James Waring.
 LOST ILLUSIONS (Illusions Perdues—I. Les Deux Poètes. Ève et David). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
 A DISTINGUISHED PROVINCIAL AT PARIS (Illusions Perdues—II. Un grand Homme de province à Paris. 1 and 2). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie Parisienne.

- A HARLOT'S PROGRESS. 2 vols. (Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes). Translated by James Waring.
 THE UNCONSCIOUS MUMMERS, Etc. (Les Comédiens sans le savoir. Un Prince de la Bohême. Un Homme d'affaires. Gaudissart II. La Maison Nucingen. Factice). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
 THE THIRTEEN (Histoire des Treize. Ferragus. La Duchesse de Langrain).
 OLD GORIOT (Le Père Goriot). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

- THE RISE AND FALL OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU (Grandeur et Décadence de César Birotteau). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- A PRINCESS'S SECRETS (Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan. Les Employés).
- COUSIN BETTY (Les Parents Pauvres—I. La Cousine Bette). Translated by James Waring.
- COUSIN PONS (Les Parents Pauvres—II. Le Cousin Pons). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie Politique.

- A GONDREVILLE MYSTERY (Une Ténébreuse Affaire. Un Episode sous la Terreur).
- THE SEAMY SIDE OF HISTORY (L'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine. Z. Marcus). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
- THE MEMBER FOR ARCIS (Le Député d'Arcis).

Scènes de la Vie Militaire.

- THE CHOUANS (Les Chouans). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Scènes de la Vie de Campagne.

- THE COUNTRY DOCTOR (Le Médecin de Campagne). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- THE COUNTRY PARSON (Le Curé de Village). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- THE PEASANTRY (Les Paysans). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.

Études Philosophiques.

- THE WILD ASS'S SKIN (La Peau de Chagrin). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE (La Recherche de l'Absolu). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- A FATHER'S CURSE (L'Enfant Maudit. Gambara. Massimilla Doni. Maître Cornélius).
- THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE, ETC. (Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu. Jésus-Christ en Flandre. Melmoth réconcilié. Les Marana. Adieu. Le Réquisitionnaire. El Verdugo. Un Drame au bord de la mer. L'Auberge rouge. L'Elixir de longue vie). Translated by Miss Ellen Marriage.
- ABOUT CATHERINE DE MÉDICIS (Sur Catherine de Médicis). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.
- SERAPHITA (Seraphita. Louis Lambert. Les Proscrits). Translated by Mrs. Clara Bell.

- THE MIDDLE CLASSES (Les Petits Bourgeois)

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN

(*La Peau de Chagrin*)

PREFACE

THE *Peau de Chagrin* is the one book of Balzac's which it is difficult for those who know it to approach without a somewhat uncritical enthusiasm. It is not faultless; no book of his is, and this cannot challenge the epithet even to the extent to which not a few others can challenge it. It is earlier than almost any of the mature novels, except the *Chouans*; and it bears in some respects the marks of its earliness as well as, in others, those of that rather artificial scheme of representing life, which was so strongly characteristic of the author, and which, while it helped him in conceiving the *Comédie Humaine*, imposed a certain restraint and hamper on the *Comédie* itself. We could spare a good deal of the journalist and other talk at the orgie; and more persons than Emile have gone to sleep over, or have escaped sleep only by skipping, the unconscionable length of Raphael's story.

But these are the merest and most miserable of details. In the first place, the conception is of the very finest. You may call it an *étude philosophique*, or you may not; you may class it as an 'allegory' on the banks of the Nile or the Seine, or any other river, if you like. Neither title will do it any harm, and neither can explain it or exalt it

higher. The Law of Nemesis—the law that every extraordinary expansion or satisfaction of heart or brain or will is paid for—paid for inevitably, incommutably, without the possibility of putting off or transferring the payment—is one of the truths about which no human being with a soul a little above the brute has the slightest doubt. It may be put religiously as, ‘Know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment’; or philosophically, as in the same book, ‘All things are double, one against the other’; or in any other fashion or language. But it is an eternal and immutable verity, and the soul of man bears witness to it.

It is Balzac’s way to provide abundant, and not always economically arranged backgrounds and contrasts for his central pictures; and the gaming-house (the model of how many gaming-houses since?), the gorgeous *capharnaum* of the curiosity shop, and the ‘orgie’ provide these in the present case lavishly enough. The orgie is undoubtedly the weakest. It is only touched with others by the pleasant and good-humoured skit of Gautier in *Les Jeunes-France*; but the note there struck is, as usual with ‘Théo,’ the right one. You cannot ‘organise’ an orgie; the thing comes naturally or not at all; and in the splendours of Taillefer, as in those of Trimalchio, there is a certain coldness.

But this is soon forgotten in the absorbing interest of the Skin and its master. The only adverse comment which has ever occurred to me is, that one might perhaps have expected a longer period of *insouciance*, of more or less reckless enjoyment of the privileges, to elapse before a vivid consciousness of the curse and of the penalty. I know no answer, unless it be that Balzac took the orgie

itself to be, as it were, the wild oats of Raphael's period—in which case he had not much to show for it. But when the actual consciousness wakes, when the Skin has been measured on the napkin, and its shrinking noted, nothing is questionable any longer. The frenzied anxiety of the victim is not overdone; the way in which his very frenzy leads him to make greater and ever greater drafts on his capital of power without any corresponding satisfaction is masterly. And the close is more masterly still. To some tastes the actual conclusion may be a thought too allegorical, but in *mil-huit-cent-trente* your allegory was your only wear; and Gautier, in the pleasant book above cited, was thoroughly in the fashion when he audaciously put a hidden literary meaning on the merry tale of 'Celle-ci et celle-là.' Here, too, if anywhere, the opposition of Pauline and Fœdora in this way is justified. It softens off the too high-strung tragedy of the catastrophe at the same time that it points the moral, and it rounds as much as it adorns the tale.

It has been observed, in no carping or hypercritical spirit, that passages of the book are somewhat high-flown in style. The fact is that Balzac had rather a tendency to this style, and only outgrew it, if he ever did outgrow it, by dint of its greater and greater unfitness for his chosen subjects. Here, if anywhere, it was excusable, just as here, if anywhere, the gigantic element in his genius found scope and play. There had been some 'inventories' in literature before, and there have been many more since the description of the curiosity shop; but none, if we except the brief Shakespearian perfection of that in Clarence's dream, and none at all in a heaped and minute style, can approach this. The thing is nightmarish—you see the

magots and the armour, the pictures and the statues, and amongst them all the sinister 'piece of shagreen,'¹ with the ineffaceable letters stamped on it.

. And so over all the book there is the note of the *voyant*, of the seer who sees and who makes others see. This note is seldom an idyllic or merely pleasant one; the writer who has it must have, even in such a book as the *Médecin de Campagne*, a black thread in his twist, a sombre background to his happy valley. Here the subject not only excuses, but demands a constant sombreness, a tone of thunder in the air, of eclipse and earthquake. And the tone is given. A very miserable person would he be who endeavoured to pick out burlesque points in the *Peau de Chagrin*, the most apocalyptic of the novels of the nineteenth century, and yet one of the most soberly true in general theme and theory. When one thinks of the tireless efforts which have been made, especially of late years, to 'pejorate' pessimism and blacken gloom, and of the too general conclusion of yawn or laugh to which they bring us, it is doubly curious to come back to this sermon by a very unpriestly preacher on the simple text, 'Whom the gods curse, to him they grant the desires of his heart.'

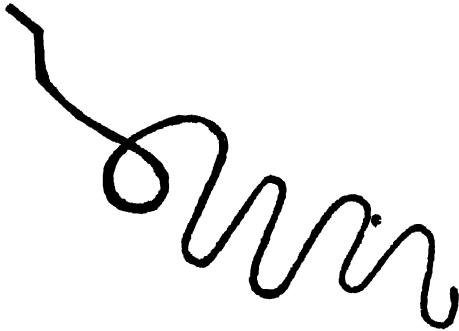
La Peau de Chagrin appeared first in August 1831, published in two volumes, by Gosselin and Canel, with a Preface and a '*Moralité*,' which the author afterwards cut out. Of its four chapters or divisions the first

¹ I hesitated between 'The Piece of Shagreen' and 'The Wild Ass's Skin' for the title, but Balzac's own remarks decided me. 'The Magic Skin' is very weak, and 'The Skin of Shagreen' hideous.

THE WILD ASS'S SKIN

TO MONSIEUR SAVARY

Member of L'Academie des Sciences



STERNE—*Tristram Shandy*, ch. cccxxii

I

THE TALISMAN

TOWARDS the end of the month of October 1829 a young man entered the Palais-Royal just as the gaming-houses opened, agreeably to the law which protects a passion by its very nature easily excisable. He mounted the staircase of one of the gambling hells distinguished by the number 36, without too much deliberation.

‘Your hat, sir, if you please?’ a thin, querulous voice called out. A little old man, crouching in the darkness

behind a railing, suddenly rose and exhibited his features, carved after a mean design.

As you enter a gaming-house the law despoils you of your hat at the outset. Is it by way of a parable, a divine revelation? Or by exacting some pledge or other, is not an infernal compact implied? Is it done to compel you to preserve a respectful demeanour towards those who are about to gain money of you? Or must the detective, who squats in our social sewers, know the name of your hatter, or your own, if you happen to have written it on the lining inside? Or, after all, is the measurement of your skull required for the compilation of statistics as to the cerebral capacity of gamblers? The executive is absolutely silent on this point. But be sure of this, that though you have scarcely taken a step towards the tables, your hat no more belongs to you now than you belong to yourself. Play possesses you, your fortune, your cap, your cane, your cloak.

As you go out, it will be made clear to you, by a savage irony, that Play has yet spared you something, since your property is returned. For all that, if you bring a new hat with you, you will have to pay for the knowledge that a special costume is needed for a gambler.

The evident astonishment with which the young man took a numbered tally in exchange for his hat, which was fortunately somewhat rubbed at the brim, showed clearly enough that his mind was yet untainted; and the little old man, who had wallowed from his youth up in the furious pleasures of a gambler's life, cast a dull, indifferent glance over him, in which a philosopher might have seen wretchedness lying in the hospital, the vagrant lives of ruined folk, inquests on numberless suicides, life-long penal servitude and transportations to Guazacoalco.

His pallid, lengthy visage appeared like a haggard embodiment of the passion reduced to its simplest terms. There were traces of past anguish in its wrinkles. He supported life on the glutinous soups at Darcet's, and

gambled away his meagre earnings day by day. Like some old hackney which takes no heed of the strokes of the whip, nothing could move him now. The stifled groans of ruined players, as they passed out, their mute imprecations, their stupefied faces, found him impassive. He was the spirit of Play incarnate. If the young man had noticed this sorry Cerberus, perhaps he would have said, 'There is only a pack of cards in that heart of his.'

The stranger did not heed this warning writ in flesh and blood, put there, no doubt, by Providence, who has set loathing on the threshold of all evil haunts. He walked boldly into the saloon, where the rattle of coin brought his senses under the dazzling spell of an agony of greed. Most likely he had been drawn thither by that most convincing of Jean Jacques' eloquent periods, which expresses, I think, this melancholy thought, 'Yes, I can imagine that a man may take to gambling when he sees only his last shilling between him and death.'

There is an illusion about a gambling saloon at night as vulgar as that of a bloodthirsty drama, and just as effective. The rooms are filled with players and onlookers, with poverty-stricken age, which drags itself thither in search of stimulation, with excited faces, and revels that began in wine, to end shortly in the Seine. The passion is there in full measure, but the great number of the actors prevents you from seeing the gambling-demon face to face. The evening is a harmony or chorus in which all take part, to which each instrument in the orchestra contributes his share. You would see there plenty of respectable people who have come in search of diversion, for which they pay as they pay for the pleasures of the theatre, or of gluttony, or they come hither as to some garret where they cheapen poignant regrets for three months to come.

Do you understand all the force and frenzy in a soul which impatiently waits for the opening of a gambling hell? Between the daylight gambler and the player at night there is the same difference that lies between a

careless husband and the lover swooning under his lady's window. Only with morning comes the real throb of the passion and the craving in its stark horror. Then you can admire the real gambler, who has neither eaten, slept, thought, nor lived, he has so smarted under the scourge of his martingale, so suffered on the rack of his desire for a coup of *trente-et-quarante*. At that accursed hour you encounter eyes whose calmness terrifies you, faces that fascinate, glances that seem as if they had power to turn the cards over and consume them. The grandest hours of a gambling saloon are not the opening ones. If Spain has bull-fights, and Rome once had her gladiators, Paris waxes proud of her Palais-Royal, where the inevitable *roulettes* cause blood to flow in streams, and the public can have the pleasure of watching without fear of their feet slipping in it.

Take a quiet peep at the arena. How bare it looks! The paper on the walls is greasy to the height of your head, there is nothing to bring one reviving thought. There is not so much as a nail for the convenience of suicides. The floor is worn and dirty. An oblong table stands in the middle of the room, the tablecloth is worn by the friction of gold, but the straw-bottomed chairs about it indicate an odd indifference to luxury in the men who will lose their lives here in the quest of the fortune that is to put luxury within their reach.

This contradiction in humanity is seen wherever the soul reacts powerfully upon itself. The gallant would clothe his mistress in silks, would deck her out in soft Eastern fabrics, though he and she must lie on a truckle-bed. The ambitious dreamer sees himself at the summit of power, while he slavishly prostrates himself in the mire. The tradesman stagnates in his damp, unhealthy shop, while he builds a great mansion for his son to inherit prematurely, only to be ejected from it by law proceedings at his own brother's instance.

After all, is there a less pleasing thing in the world

than a house of pleasure? Singular question! Man is always at strife with himself. His present woes give the lie to his hopes; yet he looks to a future which is not his, to indemnify him for these present sufferings; setting upon all his actions the seal of inconsequence and of the weakness of his nature. We have nothing here below in full measure but misfortune.

There were several gamblers in the room already when the young man entered. Three bald-headed seniors were lounging round the green table. Imperturbable as diplomats, those plaster-cast faces of theirs betokened blunted sensibilities, and hearts which had long forgotten how to throb, even when a woman's dowry was the stake. A young Italian, olive-hued and dark-haired, sat at one end, with his elbows on the table, seeming to listen to the presentiments of luck that dictate a gambler's 'Yes' or 'No.' The glow of fire and gold was on that southern face. Some seven or eight onlookers stood, by way of an audience, awaiting a drama composed of the strokes of chance, the faces of the actors, the circulation of coin, and the motion of the croupier's rake, much as a silent, motionless crowd watches the headsman in the Place de Grève. A tall, thin man, in a threadbare coat, held a card in one hand, and a pin in the other, to mark the numbers of Red or Black. He seemed a modern Tantalus, with all the pleasures of his epoch at his lips, a hoardless miser drawing in imaginary gains, a sane species of lunatic who consoles himself in his misery by chimerical dreams, a man who touches peril and vice as a young priest handles the unconsecrated wafer in the white mass.

One or two experts at the game, shrewd speculators, had placed themselves opposite the bank, like old convicts who have lost all fear of the hulks; they meant to try two or three coups, and then to depart at once with the expected gains, on which they lived. Two elderly waiters dawdled about with their arms folded, looking from time to time into the garden from the windows,

as if to show their insignificant faces as a sign to passers-by.

The croupier and banker threw a ghastly and withering glance at the punters, and cried, in a sharp voice, 'Make your game!' as the young man came in. The silence seemed to grow deeper as all heads turned curiously towards the new arrival. Who would have thought it? The jaded elders, the fossilised waiters, the onlookers, the fanatical Italian himself, felt an indefinable dread at sight of the stranger. Is he not wretched indeed who can excite pity here? Must he not be very helpless to receive sympathy, ghastly in appearance to raise a shudder in these places, where pain utters no cry, where wretchedness looks gay, and despair is decorous? Such thoughts as these produced a new emotion in these torpid hearts as the young man entered. Were not executioners known to shed tears over the fair-haired, girlish heads that had to fall at the bidding of the Revolution?

The gamblers saw at a glance a dreadful mystery in the novice's face. His young features were stamped with a melancholy grace, his looks told of unsuccess and many blighted hopes. The dull apathy of the suicide had made his forehead so deadly pale, a bitter smile carved faint lines about the corners of his mouth, and there was an abandonment about him that was painful to see. Some sort of demon sparkled in the depths of his eyes, which drooped, wearied perhaps with pleasure. Could it have been dissipation that had set its foul mark on the proud face, once pure and bright, and now brought low? Any doctor seeing the yellow circles about his eyelids, and the colour in his cheeks, would have set them down to some affection of the heart or lungs, while poets would have attributed them to the havoc brought by the search for knowledge and to night-vigils by the student's lamp.

But a complaint more fatal than any disease, a disease more merciless than genius or study, had drawn this young face, and had wrung a heart which dissipation,

study, and sickness had scarcely disturbed. When a notorious criminal is taken to the convicts' prison, the prisoners welcome him respectfully, and these evil spirits in human shape, experienced in torments, bowed before an unheard-of anguish. By the depth of the wound which met their eyes, they recognised a prince among them, by the majesty of his unspoken irony, by the refined wretchedness of his garb. The frock-coat that he wore was well cut, but his cravat was on terms so intimate with his waistcoat that no one could suspect him of underlinen. His hands, shapely as a woman's, were not perfectly clean; for two days past indeed he had ceased to wear gloves. If the very croupier and the waiters shuddered, it was because some traces of the spell of innocence yet hung about his meagre, delicately-shaped form, and his scanty fair hair in its natural curls.

He looked only about twenty-five years of age, and any trace of vice in his face seemed to be there by accident. A young constitution still resisted the inroads of lubricity. Darkness and light, annihilation and existence, seemed to struggle in him, with effects of mingled beauty and terror. There he stood like some erring angel that has lost his radiance; and these emeritus-professors of vice and shame were ready to bid the novice depart, even as some toothless crone might be seized with pity for a beautiful girl who offers herself up to infamy.

The young man went straight up to the table, and, as he stood there, flung down a piece of gold which he held in his hand, without deliberation. It rolled on to the Black; then, as strong natures can, he looked calmly, if anxiously, at the croupier, as if he held useless subterfuges in scorn.

The interest this coup awakened was so great that the old gamblers laid nothing upon it; only the Italian, inspired by a gambler's enthusiasm, smiled suddenly at some thought, and punted his heap of coin against the stranger's stake.

The banker forgot to pronounce the phrases that use

and wont have reduced to an inarticulate cry—'Make your game. . . . The game is made. . . . Bets are closed.' The croupier spread out the cards, and seemed to wish luck to the new comer, indifferent as he was to the losses or gains of those who took part in these sombre pleasures. Every bystander thought he saw a drama, the closing scene of a noble life, in the fortunes of that bit of gold; and eagerly fixed his eyes on the prophetic cards; but however closely they watched the young man, they could discover not the least sign of feeling on his cool but restless face.

'Even! red wins,' said the croupier officially. A dumb sort of rattle came from the Italian's throat when he saw the folded notes that the banker showered upon him, one after another. The young man only understood his calamity when the croupier's rake was extended to sweep away his last napoleon. The ivory touched the coin with a little click, as it swept it with the speed of an arrow into the heap of gold before the bank. The stranger turned pale at the lips, and softly shut his eyes, but he unclosed them again at once, and the red colour returned as he affected the airs of an Englishman, to whom life can offer no new sensation, and disappeared without the glance full of entreaty for compassion that a desperate gamester will often give the bystanders. How much can happen in a second's space; how many things depend on a throw of the die!

'That was his last cartridge, of course,' said the croupier, smiling after a moment's silence, during which he picked up the coin between his finger and thumb and held it up.

'He is a cracked brain that will go and drown himself,' said a frequenter of the place. He looked round about at the other players, who all knew each other.

'Bah!' said a waiter, as he took a pinch of snuff.

'If we had but followed *his* example,' said an old gamester to the others, as he pointed out the Italian.

Everybody looked at the lucky player, whose hands shook as he counted his bank-notes.

'A voice seemed to whisper to me,' he said. 'The luck is sure to go against that young man's despair.'

'He is a new hand,' said the banker, 'or he would have divided his money into three parts to give himself more chance.'

The young man went out without asking for his hat ; but the old watch-dog, who had noted its shabby condition, returned it to him without a word. The gambler mechanically gave up the tally, and went downstairs whistling *Di tanti Palpiti* so feebly, that he himself scarcely heard the delicious notes.

He found himself immediately under the arcades of the Palais-Royal, reached the Rue Saint Honoré, took the direction of the Tuileries, and crossed the gardens with an undecided step. He walked as if he were in some desert, elbowed by men whom he did not see, hearing through all the voices of the crowd one voice alone—the voice of Death. He was lost in the thoughts that benumbed him at last, like the criminals who used to be taken in carts from the Palais de Justice to the Place de Grève, where the scaffold awaited them reddened with all the blood spilt there since 1793.

There is something great and terrible about suicide. Most people's downfalls are not dangerous ; they are like children who have not far to fall, and cannot injure themselves ; but when a great nature is dashed down, he is bound to fall from a height. He must have been raised almost to the skies ; he has caught glimpses of some heaven beyond his reach. Vehement must the storms be which compel a soul to seek for peace from the trigger of a pistol.

How much young power starves and pines away in a garret for want of a friend, for lack of a woman's consolation, in the midst of millions of fellow-creatures, in the presence of a listless crowd that is burdened by its

wealth! When one remembers all this, suicide looms large. Between a self-sought death and the abundant hopes whose voices call a young man to Paris, God only knows what may intervene; what contending ideas have striven within the soul; what poems have been set aside; what moans and what despair have been repressed; what abortive masterpieces and vain endeavours! Every suicide is an awful poem of sorrow. Where will you find a work of genius floating above the seas of literature that can compare with this paragraph:—

‘Yesterday, at four o’clock, a young woman threw herself into the Seine from the Pont des Arts.’

Dramas and romances pale before this concise Parisian phrase; so must even that old frontispiece, *The Lamentations of the glorious king of Kaërnavan, put in prison by his children*, the sole remaining fragment of a lost work that drew tears from Sterne at the bare perusal—the same Sterne who deserted his own wife and family.

The stranger was beset with such thoughts as these, which passed in fragments through his mind, like tattered flags fluttering above the combat. If he set aside for a moment the burdens of consciousness and of memory, to watch the flower heads gently swayed by the breeze among the green thickets, a revulsion came over him, life struggled against the oppressive thought of suicide, and his eyes rose to the sky: grey clouds, melancholy gusts of the wind, the stormy atmosphere, all decreed that he should die.

He bent his way toward the Pont Royal, musing over the last fancies of others who had gone before him. He smiled to himself as he remembered that Lord Castlereagh had satisfied the humblest of our needs before he cut his throat, and that the academician Auger had sought for his snuff-box as he went to his death. He analysed these extravagances, and even examined himself; for as he stood aside against the parapet to allow a porter to pass, his coat had been whitened somewhat by the contact, and

he carefully brushed the dust from his sleeve, to his own surprise. He reached the middle of the arch, and looked forebodingly at the water.

‘Wretched weather for drowning yourself,’ said a ragged old woman, who grinned at him; ‘isn’t the Seine cold and dirty?’

His answer was a ready smile, which showed the frenzied nature of his courage; then he shivered all at once as he saw at a distance, by the door of the Tuileries, a shed with an inscription above it in letters twelve inches high: THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY’S APPARATUS.

A vision of M. Dacheux rose before him, equipped by his philanthropy, calling out and setting in motion the too efficacious oars which break the heads of drowning men, if unluckily they should rise to the surface; he saw a curious crowd collecting, running for a doctor, preparing fumigations; he read the maundering paragraph in the papers, put between notes on a festivity and on the smiles of a ballet-dancer; he heard the francs counted down by the prefect of police to the watermen. As a corpse, he was worth fifteen francs; but now while he lived he was only a man of talent without patrons, without friends, without a mattress to lie on, or any one to speak a word for him—a perfect social cipher, useless to a State which gave itself no trouble about him.

A death in broad daylight seemed degrading to him; he made up his mind to die at night so as to bequeath an unrecognisable corpse to a world which had disregarded the greatness of his life. He began his wanderings again, turning towards the Quai Voltaire, imitating the lagging gait of an idler seeking to kill time. As he came down the steps at the end of the bridge, his notice was attracted by the second-hand books displayed on the parapet, and he was on the point of bargaining for some. He smiled, thrust his hands philosophically into his pockets, and fell to strolling on again with a proud disdain in his manner,

when he heard to his surprise some coin rattling fantastically in his pocket.

A smile of hope lit his face, and slid from his lips over his features, over his brow, and brought a joyful light to his eyes and his dark cheeks. It was a spark of happiness like one of the red dots that flit over the remains of a burnt scrap of paper; but as it is with the black ashes, so it was with his face, it became dull again when the stranger quickly drew out his hand and perceived three pennies. 'Ah, kind gentleman! *carita, carita*: for the love of St. Catherine! only a halfpenny to buy some bread!'

A little chimney sweeper, with puffed cheeks, all black with soot, and clad in tatters, held out his hand to beg for the man's last pence.

Two paces from the little Savoyard stood an old *pauvre honteux*, sickly and feeble, in wretched garments of ragged druggeting, who asked in a thick, muffled voice—

'Anything you like to give, monsieur; I will pray to God for you . . .'

But the young man turned his eyes on him, and the old beggar stopped without another word, discerning in that mournful face an abandonment of wretchedness more bitter than his own.

'*La carita! la carita!*'

The stranger threw the coins to the old man and the child, left the footway, and turned towards the houses; the harrowing sight of the Seine fretted him beyond endurance.

'May God lengthen your days!' cried the two beggars.

As he reached the shop window of a print seller, this man on the brink of death met a young woman alighting from a showy carriage. He looked in delight at her prettiness, at the pale face appropriately framed by the satin of her fashionable bonnet. Her slender form and graceful movements entranced him. Her skirt had been slightly raised as she stepped to the pavement, disclosing a daintily fitting white stocking over the delicate outlines

beneath. The young lady went into the shop, purchased albums and sets of lithographs ; giving several gold coins for them, which glittered and rang upon the counter. The young man, seemingly occupied with the prints in the window, fixed upon the fair stranger a gaze as eager as man can give, to receive in exchange an indifferent glance, such as lights by accident on a passer-by. For him it was a leave-taking of love and of woman ! but his final and strenuous questioning glance was neither understood nor felt by the slight-natured woman there ; her colour did not rise, her eyes did not droop. What was it to her ? one more piece of adulation, yet another sigh only prompted the delightful thought at night, 'I looked rather well to-day.'

• The young man quickly turned to another picture, and only left it when she returned to her carriage. The horses started off, the final vision of luxury and refinement went under an eclipse, just as that life of his would soon do also. Slowly and sadly he followed the line of the shops, listlessly examining the specimens on view. When the shops came to an end, he reviewed the Louvre, the Institute, the towers of Notre Dame, of the Palais, the Pont des Arts ; all these public monuments seemed to have taken their tone from the heavy grey sky.

Fitful gleams of light gave a foreboding look to Paris ; like a pretty woman, the city has mysterious fits of ugliness or beauty. So the outer world seemed to be in a plot to steep this man about to die in a painful trance. A prey to the maleficent power which acts relaxingly upon us by the fluid circulating through our nerves, his whole frame seemed gradually to experience a dissolving process. He felt the anguish of these throes passing through him in waves, and the houses and the crowd seemed to surge to and fro in a mist before his eyes. He tried to escape the agitation wrought in his mind by the revulsions of his physical nature, and went toward the shop of a dealer in antiquities, thinking to give a treat to his senses, and

to spend the interval till nightfall in bargaining over curiosities.

He sought, one might say, to regain courage and to find a stimulant, like a criminal who doubts his power to reach the scaffold. The consciousness of approaching death gave him, for the time being, the intrepidity of a duchess with a couple of lovers, so that he entered the place with an abstracted look, while his lips displayed a set smile like a drunkard's. Had not life, or rather had not death, intoxicated him? Dizziness soon overcame him again. Things appeared to him in strange colours, or as making slight movements; his irregular pulse was no doubt the cause; the blood that sometimes rushed like a burning torrent through his veins, and sometimes lay torpid and stagnant as tepid water. He merely asked leave to see if the shop contained any curiosities which he required.

A plump-faced young shopman with red hair, in an otter-skin cap, left an old peasant woman in charge of the shop—a sort of feminine Caliban, employed in cleaning a stove made marvellous by Bernard Palissy's work. This youth remarked carelessly—

'Look round, *monsieur!* We have nothing very remarkable here downstairs; but if I may trouble you to go up to the first floor, I will show you some very fine mummies from Cairo, some inlaid pottery, and some carved ebony—*genuine Renaissance* work, just come in, and of perfect beauty.'

In the stranger's fearful position this cicerone's prattle and shopman's empty talk seemed like the petty vexations by which narrow minds destroy a man of genius. But as he must even go through with it, he appeared to listen to his guide, answering him by gestures or monosyllables; but imperceptibly he arrogated the privilege of saying nothing, and gave himself up without hindrance to his closing meditations, which were appalling. He had a poet's temperament, his mind had entered by chance on a

vast field; and he must see perforce the dry bones of twenty future worlds.

At a first glance the place presented a confused picture in which every achievement, human and divine, was mingled. Crocodiles, monkeys, and serpents stuffed with straw grinned at glass from church windows, seemed to wish to bite sculptured heads, to chase lacquered work, or to scramble up chandeliers. A Sèvres vase, bearing Napoleon's portrait by Mme. Jacotot, stood beside a sphinx dedicated to Sesostris. The beginnings of the world and the events of yesterday were mingled with grotesque cheerfulness. A kitchen jack leaned against a pyx, a republican sabre on a mediæval hackbut. Mme. du Barry, with a star above her head, naked, and surrounded by a cloud, seemed to look longingly out of Latour's pastel at an Indian chibook, while she tried to guess the purpose of the spiral curves that wound towards her. Instruments of death, poniards, curious pistols, and disguised weapons had been flung down pell-mell among the paraphernalia of daily life; porcelain tureens, Dresden plates, translucent cups from China, old salt-cellar, comfit-boxes belonging to feudal times. A carved ivory ship sped full sail on the back of a motionless tortoise.

The Emperor Augustus remained unmoved and imperial with an air-pump thrust into one eye. Portraits of French sheriffs and Dutch burgomasters, phlegmatic now as when in life, looked down pallid and unconcerned on the chaos of past ages below them.

Every land of earth seemed to have contributed some stray fragment of its learning, some example of its art. Nothing seemed lacking to this philosophical kitchen-midden from a redskin's calumet, a green and golden slipper from the seraglio, a Moorish yataghan, a Tartar idol, to the soldier's tobacco pouch, to the priest's ciborium, and the plumes that once adorned a throne. This extraordinary combination was rendered yet more bizarre by the accidents of lighting, by a multitude of confused

reflections of various hues, by the sharp contrast of blacks and whites. Broken cries seemed to reach the ear, unfinished dramas seized upon the imagination, smothered lights caught the eye. A thin coating of inevitable dust covered all the multitudinous corners and convolutions of these objects of various shapes which gave highly picturesque effects.

First of all, the stranger compared the three galleries which civilisation, cults, divinities, masterpieces, dominions, carousals, sanity, and madness had filled to repletion, to a mirror with numerous facets, each depicting a world. After this first hazy idea he would fain have selected his pleasures; but by dint of using his eyes, thinking and musing, a fever began to possess him, caused perhaps by the gnawing pain of hunger. The spectacle of so much existence, individual or national, to which these pledges bore witness, ended by numbing his senses—the purpose with which he entered the shop was fulfilled. He had left the real behind, and had climbed gradually up to an ideal world; he had attained to the enchanted palace of ecstasy, whence the universe appeared to him by fragments and in shapes of flame, as once the future blazed out before the eyes of St. John in Patmos.

A crowd of sorrowing faces, beneficent and appalling, dark and luminous, far and near, gathered in numbers, in myriads, in whole generations. Egypt, rigid and mysterious, arose from her sands in the form of a mummy swathed in black bandages; then the Pharaohs swallowed up nations, that they might build themselves a tomb; and he beheld Moses and the Hebrews and the desert, and a solemn antique world. Fresh and joyous, a marble statue spoke to him from a twisted column of the pleasure-loving myths of Greece and Ionia. Ah! who would not have smiled with him to see, against the earthen red background, the brown-faced maiden dancing with gleeful reverence before the god Priapus,

wrought in the fine clay of an Etruscan vase? The Latin queen caressed her chimera.

The whims of Imperial Rome were there in life, the bath was disclosed, the toilette of a languid Julia, dreaming, waiting for her Tibullus. Strong with the might of Arabic spells, the head of Cicero evoked memories of a free Rome, and unrolled before him the scrolls of Titus Livius. The young man beheld *Senatus Populusque Romanus*; consuls, lictors, togas with purple fringes; the fighting in the Forum, the angry people, passed in review before him like the cloudy faces of a dream.

Then Christian Rome predominated in his vision. A painter had laid heaven open; he beheld the Virgin Mary wrapped in a golden cloud among the angels, shining more brightly than the sun, receiving the prayers of sufferers, on whom this second Ève Regenerate smiles pityingly. At the touch of a mosaic, made of various lavas from Vesuvius and Etna, his fancy fled to the hot tawny south of Italy. He was present at Borgia's orgies, he roved among the Abruzzi, sought for Italian love intrigues, grew ardent over pale faces and dark, almond-shaped eyes. He shivered over midnight adventures, cut short by the cool thrust of a jealous blade, as he saw a mediæval dagger with a hilt wrought like lace, and spots of rust like splashes of blood upon it.

India and its religions took the shape of the idol with his peaked cap of fantastic form, with little bells, clad in silk and gold. Close by, a mat, as pretty as the bayadere who once lay upon it, still gave out a faint scent of sandal wood. His fancy was stirred by a goggle-eyed Chinese monster, with mouth awry and twisted limbs, the invention of a people who, grown weary of the monotony of beauty, found an indescribable pleasure in an infinite variety of ugliness. A salt-cellar from Benvenuto Cellini's workshop carried him back to the Renaissance at its height, to the time when there was no restraint on art or morals, when torture was the sport of

sovereigns; and from their councils, churchmen with courtesans' arms about them issued decrees of chastity for simple priests.

On a cameo he saw the conquests of Alexander, the massacres of Pizarro in a matchlock, and religious wars disorderly, fanatical, and cruel, in the shadows of a helmet. Joyous pictures of chivalry were called up by a suit of Milanese armour, brightly polished and richly wrought; a paladin's eyes seemed to sparkle yet under the visor.

This sea of inventions, fashions, furniture, works of art and fiascos, made for him a poem without end. Shapes and colours and projects all lived again for him, but his mind received no clear and perfect conception. It was the poet's task to complete the sketches of the great master, who had scornfully mingled on his palette the hues of the numberless vicissitudes of human life. When the world at large at last released him, when he had pondered over many lands, many epochs, and various empires, the young man came back to the life of the individual. He impersonated fresh characters, and turned his mind to details, rejecting the life of nations as a burden too overwhelming for a single soul.

Yonder was a sleeping child modelled in wax, a relic of Ruysch's collection, an enchanting creation which brought back the happiness of his own childhood. The cotton garment of a Tahitian maid next fascinated him; he beheld the primitive life of nature, the real modesty of naked chastity, the joys of an idleness natural to mankind; a peaceful fate by a slow river of sweet water under a plantain tree that bears its pleasant manna without the toil of man. Then all at once he became a corsair, investing himself with the terrible poetry that Lara has given to the part: the thought came at the sight of the mother-of-pearl tints of a myriad sea-shells, and grew as he saw madrepores redolent of the sea-weeds and the storms of the Atlantic.

The sea was forgotten again at a distant view of

exquisite miniatures; he admired a precious missal in manuscript, adorned with arabesques in gold and blue. Thoughts of peaceful life swayed him; he devoted himself afresh to study and research, longing for the easy life of the monk, devoid alike of cares and pleasures; and from the depths of his cell he looked out upon the meadows, woods, and vineyards of his convent. Pausing before some work of Teniers, he took for his own the helmet of the soldier or the poverty of the artisan; he wished to wear a smoke-begrimed cap with these Flemings, to drink their beer and join their game at cards, and smiled upon the comely plumpness of a peasant woman. He shivered at a snowstorm by Mieris; he seemed to take part in Salvator Rosa's battle-piece; he ran his fingers over a tomahawk from Illinois, and felt his own hair rise as he touched a Cherokee scalping-knife. He marvelled over the rebec that he set in the hands of some lady of the land, drank in the musical notes of her ballad, and in the twilight by the gothic arch above the hearth he told his love in a gloom so deep that he could not read his answer in her eyes.

He caught at all delights, at all sorrows; grasped at existence in every form; and endowed the phantoms conjured up from that inert and plastic material so liberally with his own life and feelings, that the sound of his own footsteps reached him as if from another world, or as the hum of Paris reaches the towers of Notre Dame.

He ascended the inner staircase which led to the first floor, with its votive shields, panoplies, carved shrines, and figures on the wall at every step. Haunted by the strangest shapes, by marvellous creations belonging to the borderland betwixt life and death, he walked as if under the spell of a dream. His own existence became a matter of doubt to him; he was neither wholly alive nor dead, like the curious objects about him. The light began to fade as he reached the show-rooms, but the treasures of gold and silver heaped up there scarcely

seemed to need illumination from without. The most extravagant whims of prodigals, who have run through millions to perish in garrets, had left their traces here in this vast bazaar of human follies. Here, beside a writing desk, made at the cost of 100,000 francs, and sold for a hundred pence, lay a lock with a secret worth a king's ransom. The human race was revealed in all the grandeur of its wretchedness; in all the splendour of its infinite littleness. An ebony table that an artist might worship, carved after Jean Goujon's designs, in years of toil, had been purchased perhaps at the price of firewood. Precious caskets, and things that fairy hands might have fashioned, lay there in heaps like rubbish.

'You must have the worth of millions here!' cried the young man as he entered the last of an immense suite of rooms, all decorated and gilt by eighteenth century artists.

'Thousands of millions, you might say,' said the florid shopman; 'but you have seen nothing as yet. Go up to the third floor, and you shall see!'

The stranger followed his guide to a fourth gallery, where one by one there passed before his wearied eyes several pictures by Poussin, a magnificent statue by Michael Angelo, enchanting landscapes by Claude Lorraine, a Gerard Dow (like a stray page from Sterne), Rembrandts, Murillos, and pictures by Velasquez, as dark and full of colour as a poem of Byron's; then came classic bas-reliefs, finely-cut agates, wonderful cameos! Works of art upon works of art, till the craftsman's skill palled on the mind, masterpiece after masterpiece till art itself became hateful at last and enthusiasm died. He came upon a Madonna by Raphael, but he was tired of Raphael; a figure by Correggio never received the glance it demanded of him. A priceless vase of antique porphyry carved round about with pictures of the most grotesquely wanton of Roman divinities, the pride of some Corinna, scarcely drew a smile from him.

The ruins of fifteen hundred vanished years oppressed him; he sickened under all this human thought; felt bored by all this luxury and art. He struggled in vain against the constantly renewed fantastic shapes that sprang up from under his feet, like children of some sportive demon.

Are not fearful poisons set up in the soul by a swift concentration of all her energies, her enjoyments, or ideas; as modern chemistry, in its caprice, repeats the action of creation by some gas or other? Do not many men perish under the shock of the sudden expansion of some moral acid within them?

'What is there in that box?' he inquired, as he reached a large closet—final triumph of human skill, originality, wealth, and splendour, in which there hung a large, square mahogany coffer, suspended from a nail by a silver chain.

'Ah, *monsieur* keeps the key of it,' said the stout assistant mysteriously. 'If you wish to see the portrait, I will gladly venture to tell him.'

'Venture!' said the young man; 'then is your master a prince?'

'I don't know what he is,' the other answered. Equally astonished, each looked for a moment at the other. Then construing the stranger's silence as an order, the apprentice left him alone in the closet.

Have you never launched into the immensity of time and space as you read the geological writings of Cuvier? Carried by his fancy, have you hung as if suspended by a magician's wand over the illimitable abyss of the past? When the fossil bones of animals belonging to civilisations before the Flood are turned up in bed after bed and layer upon layer of the quarries of Montmartre or among the schists of the Ural range, the soul receives with dismay a glimpse of millions of peoples forgotten by feeble human memory and unrecognised by permanent divine tradition, peoples whose ashes cover our globe with two feet of earth that yields bread to us and flowers.

Is not Cuvier the great poet of our era? Byron has

given admirable expression to certain moral conflicts, but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed past worlds from a few bleached bones; has rebuilt cities, like Cadmus, with monsters' teeth; has animated forests with all the secrets of zoology gleaned from a piece of coal; has discovered a giant population from the footprints of a mammoth. These forms stand erect, grow large, and fill regions commensurate with their giant size. He treats figures like a poet; a nought set beside a seven by him produces awe.

He can call up nothingness before you without the phrases of a charlatan. He searches a lump of gypsum, finds an impression in it, says to you, 'Behold!' All at once marble takes an animal shape, the dead come to life, the history of the world is laid open before you. After countless dynasties of giant creatures, races of fish and clans of molluscs, the race of man appears at last as the degenerate copy of a splendid model, which the Creator has perchance destroyed. Emboldened by his gaze into the past, this petty race, children of yesterday, can overstep chaos, can raise a psalm without end, and outline for themselves the story of the Universe in an Apocalypse that reveals the past. After the tremendous resurrection that took place at the voice of this man, the little drop in the nameless Infinite, common to all the spheres, that is outs to use, and that we call Time, seems to us a pitiable moment of life. We ask ourselves the purpose of our triumphs, our hatreds, our loves, overwhelmed as we are by the destruction of so many past universes, and whether it is worth while to accept the pain of life in order that hereafter we may become an intangible speck. Then we remain as if dead, completely torn away from the present till the *valet de chambre* comes in and says, '*Madame la comtesse* answers that she is expecting *monsieur*.'

All the wonders which had brought the known world before the young man's mind wrought in his soul much the same feeling of dejection that besets the philosopher

investigating unknown creations. He longed more than ever for death as he flung himself back in a curule chair and let his eyes wander across the illusions composing a panorama of the past. The pictures seemed to light up, the Virgin's heads smiled on him, the statues seemed alive. Everything danced and swayed around him, with a motion due to the gloom and the tormenting fever that racked his brain; each monstrosity grimaced at him, while the portraits on the canvas closed their eyes for a little relief. Every shape seemed to tremble and start, and to leave its place gravely or flippantly, gracefully or awkwardly, according to its fashion, character, and surroundings.

A mysterious Sabbath began, rivalling the fantastic scenes witnessed by Faust upon the Brocken. But these optical illusions, produced by weariness, over-strained eyesight, or the accidents of twilight, could not alarm the stranger. The terrors of life had no power over a soul grown familiar with the terrors of death. He even gave himself up, half amused by its bizarre eccentricities, to the influence of this moral galvanism; its phenomena, closely connected with his last thoughts, assured him that he was still alive. The silence about him was so deep that he embarked once more in dreams that grew gradually darker and darker as if by magic, as the light slowly faded. A last struggling ray from the sun lit up rosy answering lights. He raised his head and saw a skeleton dimly visible, with its skull bent doubtfully to one side, as if to say, 'The dead will none of thee as yet.' •

He passed his hand over his forehead to shake off the drowsiness, and felt a cold breath of air as an unknown furry something swept past his cheeks. He shivered. A muffled clatter of the windows followed; it was a bat, he fancied, that had given him this chilly sepulchral caress. He could yet dimly see for a moment the shapes that surrounded him, by the vague light in the west; then all these inanimate objects were, blotted out in uniform darkness.

Night and the hour of death had suddenly come. Thenceforward, for a while, he lost consciousness of the things about him; he was either buried in deep meditation, or sleep overcame him, brought on by weariness or by the stress of those many thoughts that lacerated his heart.

Suddenly he thought that an awful voice called him by name; it was like some feverish nightmare, when at a step the dreamer falls headlong over into an abyss, and he trembled. He closed his eyes, dazzled by bright rays from a red circle of light that shone out from the shadows. In the midst of the circle stood a little old man who turned the light of a lamp upon him, yet he had not heard him enter, nor move, nor speak. There was something magical about the apparition. The boldest man, awakened in such a sort, would have felt alarm at the sight of this figure, which might have issued from some sarcophagus hard by.

A curiously youthful look in the unmoving eyes of the spectre forbade the idea of anything supernatural; but for all that, in the brief space between his dreaming and waking life, the young man's judgment remained philosophically suspended, as Descartes advises. He was, in spite of himself, under the influence of an unaccountable hallucination, a mystery that our pride rejects, and that our imperfect science vainly tries to resolve.

Imagine a short old man, thin and spare, in a long black velvet gown girded round him by a thick silk cord. His long white hair escaped on either side of his face from under a black velvet cap which closely fitted his head and made a formal setting for his countenance. His gown enveloped his body like a winding-sheet, so that all that was left visible was a narrow bleached human face. But for the wasted arm, thin as a draper's wand, which held aloft the lamp that cast all its light upon him, the face would have seemed to hang in mid air. A grey pointed beard concealed the chin of this fantastical appearance, and gave him the look of one of those Jewish types which

serve artists as models for Moses. His lips were so thin and colourless that it needed a close inspection to find the lines of his mouth at all in the pallid face. His great wrinkled brow and hollow bloodless cheeks, the inexorably stern expression of his small green eyes that no longer possessed eyebrows or lashes, might have convinced the stranger that Gerard Dow's 'Money Changer' had come down from his frame. The craftiness of an inquisitor, revealed in those curving wrinkles and creases that wound about his temples, indicated a profound knowledge of life. There was no deceiving this man, who seemed to possess a power of detecting the secrets of the wariest heart.

The wisdom and the moral codes of every people seemed gathered up in his passive face, just as all the productions of the globe had been heaped up in his dusty showrooms. He seemed to possess the tranquil luminous vision of some god before whom all things are open, or the haughty power of a man who knows all things.

With two strokes of the brush a painter could have so altered the expression of this face, that what had been a serene representation of the Eternal Father should change to the sneering mask of a Mephistopheles; for though sovereign power was revealed by the forehead, mocking folds lurked about the mouth. He must have sacrificed all the joys of earth, as he had crushed all human sorrows beneath his potent will. The man at the brink of death shivered at the thought of the life led by this spirit, so solitary and remote from our world; joyless, since he had no one illusion left; painless, because pleasure had ceased to exist for him. There he stood, motionless and serene as a star in a bright mist. His lamp lit up the obscure closet, just as his green eyes, with their quiet malevolence, seemed to shed a light on the moral world.

This was the strange spectacle that startled the young man's returning sight, as he shook off the dreamy fancies and thoughts of death that had lulled him. An instant

of dismay, a momentary return to belief in nursery tales, may be forgiven him, seeing that his senses were obscured. Much thought had wearied his mind, and his nerves were exhausted with the strain of the tremendous drama within him, and by the scenes that had heaped on him all the horrid pleasures that a piece of opium can produce.

But this apparition had appeared in Paris, on the Quai Voltaire, and in the nineteenth century; the time and place made sorcery impossible. The idol of French scepticism had died in the house just opposite, the disciple of Gay-Lussac and Arago, who had held the charlatanism of intellect in contempt. And yet the stranger submitted himself to the influence of an imaginative spell, as all of us do at times, when we wish to escape from an inevitable certainty, or to tempt the power of Providence. So some mysterious apprehension of a strange force made him tremble before the old man with the lamp. All of us have been stirred in the same way by the sight of Napoleon, or of some other great man, made illustrious by his genius or by fame.

'You wish to see Raphael's portrait of Jesus Christ, monsieur?' the old man asked politely. There was something metallic in the clear, sharp ring of his voice.

He set the lamp upon a broken column, so that all its light might fall on the brown case.

At the sacred names of Christ and Raphael the young man showed some curiosity. The merchant, who no doubt looked for this, pressed a spring, and suddenly the mahogany panel slid noiselessly back in its groove, and discovered the canvas to the stranger's admiring gaze. At sight of this deathless creation, he forgot his fancies in the show-rooms and the freaks of his dreams, and became himself again. The old man became a being of flesh and blood, very much alive, with nothing chimerical about him, and took up his existence at once upon solid earth.

The sympathy and love, and the gentle serenity in the divine face, exerted an instant sway over the younger

spectator. Some influence falling from heaven bade cease the burning torment that consumed the marrow of his bones. The head of the Saviour of mankind seemed to issue from among the shadows represented by a dark background; an aureole of light shone out brightly from his hair; an impassioned belief seemed to glow through him, and to thrill every feature. The word of life had just been uttered by those red lips, the sacred sounds seemed to linger still in the air; the spectator besought the silence for those captivating parables, hearkened for them in the future, and had to turn to the teachings of the past. The untroubled peace of the divine eyes, the comfort of sorrowing souls, seemed an interpretation of the Evangel. The sweet triumphant smile revealed the secret of the Catholic religion, which sums up all things in the precept, 'Love one another.' This picture breathed the spirit of prayer, enjoined forgiveness, overcame self, caused sleeping powers of good to waken. For this work of Raphael's had the imperious charm of music; you were brought under the spell of memories of the past; his triumph was so absolute that the artist was forgotten. The witchery of the lamplight heightened the wonder; the head seemed at times to flicker in the distance, enveloped in cloud.

'I covered the surface of that picture with gold pieces,' said the merchant carelessly.

'And now for death!' cried the young man, awakened from his musings. His last thought had recalled his fate to him, as it led him imperceptibly back from the forlorn hopes to which he had clung.

'Ah, ha! then my suspicions were well founded!' said the other, and his hands held the young man's wrists in a grip like that of a vice.

The younger man smiled wearily at his mistake, and said gently—

'You, sir, have nothing to fear; it is not your life, but my own that is in question. . . . But why should I

hide a harmless fraud?' he went on, after a look at the anxious old man. 'I came to see your treasures to while away the time till night should come and I could drown myself decently. Who would grudge this last pleasure to a poet and a man of science?'

While he spoke, the jealous merchant watched the haggard face of his pretended customer with keen eyes. Perhaps the mournful tones of his voice reassured him, or he also read the dark signs of fate in the faded features that had made the gamblers shudder; he released his hands, but, with a touch of caution, due to the experience of some hundred years at least, he stretched his arm out to a sideboard as if to steady himself, took up a little dagger, and said—

'Have you been a supernumerary clerk of the Treasury for three years without receiving any perquisites?'

The stranger could scarcely suppress a smile as he shook his head.

'Perhaps your father has expressed his regret for your birth a little too sharply? Or have you disgraced yourself?'

'If I meant to be disgraced, I should live.'

'You have been hissed perhaps at the Funambules? Or you have had to compose couplets to pay for your mistress's funeral? Do you want to be cured of the gold fever? Or to be quit of the spleen: For what blunder is your life a forfeit?'

'You must not look among the common motives that impel suicides for the reason of my death. To spare myself the task of disclosing my unheard-of sufferings, for which language has no name, I will tell you this—that I am in the deepest, most humiliating, and most cruel trouble, and,' he went on in proud tones that harmonised ill with the words just uttered, 'I have no wish to beg for either help or sympathy.'

'Eh! eh!'

The two syllables which the old man pronounced resembled the sound of a rattle. Then he went on thus:

‘Without compelling you to entreat me, without making you blush for it, and without giving you so much as a French centime, a para from the Levant, a German heller, a Russian kopeck, a Scottish farthing, a single obolus or sestercius from the ancient world, or one piastre from the new, without offering you anything whatever in gold, silver, or copper, notes or drafts, I will make you richer, more powerful, and of more consequence than a constitutional king.’

The younger man thought that the older was in his dotage, and waited in bewilderment without venturing to reply.

‘Turn round,’ said the merchant, suddenly catching up the lamp in order to light up the opposite wall; ‘look at that leathern skin,’ he went on.

The young man rose abruptly, and showed some surprise at the sight of a piece of shagreen which hung on the wall behind his chair. It was only about the size of a fox’s skin, but it seemed to fill the deep shadows of the place with such brilliant rays that it looked like a small comet, an appearance at first sight inexplicable. The young sceptic went up to this so-called talisman, which was to rescue him from his woes, with a scoffing phrase in his thoughts. Still a harmless curiosity led him to bend over it and look at it from all points of view, and he soon found out the cause of its singular brilliancy. The dark grain of the leather had been so carefully burnished and polished, the striped markings of the graining were so sharp and clear, that every particle of the surface of the bit of Oriental leather was in itself a focus which concentrated the light, and reflected it vividly.

He accounted for this phenomenon categorically to the old man, who only smiled meaningly by way of answer. His superior smile led the young scientific man to fancy that he himself had been deceived by some imposture. He had no wish to carry one more puzzle to his grave,

and hastily turned the skin over, like some child eager to find out the mysteries of a new toy.

'Ah,' he cried, 'here is the mark of the seal which they call in the East the Signet of Solomon.'

'So you know that, then?' asked the merchant. His peculiar method of laughter, two or three quick breathings through the nostrils, said more than any words however eloquent.

'Is there anybody in the world simple enough to believe in that idle fancy?' said the young man, nettled by the spitefulness of the silent chuckle. 'Don't you know,' he continued, 'that the superstitions of the East have perpetuated the mystical form and the counterfeit characters of the symbol, which represents a mythical dominion? I have no more laid myself open to a charge of credulity in this case, than if I had mentioned sphinxes or griffins, whose existence mythology in a manner admits.'

'As you are an Orientalist,' replied the other, "perhaps you can read that sentence.'

He held the lamp close to the talisman, which the young man held towards him, and pointed out some characters inlaid in the surface of the wonderful skin, as if they had grown on the animal to which it once belonged.

'I must admit,' said the stranger, 'that I have no idea how the letters could be engraved so deeply on the skin of a wild ass.' And he turned quickly to the tables strewn with curiosities, and seemed to look for something.

'What is it that you want?' asked the old man.

'Something that will cut the leather, so that I can see whether the letters are printed or inlaid.'

The old man held out his stiletto. The stranger took it and tried to cut the skin above the lettering; but when he had removed a thin shaving of leather from them, the characters still appeared below, so clear and so exactly like the surface impression, that for a moment he was not sure that he had cut anything away after all.

The craftsmen of the Levant have secrets known only

to themselves,' he said, half in vexation, as he eyed the characters of this Oriental sentence.

'Yes,' said the old man, 'it is better to attribute it to man's agency than to God's.'

The mysterious words were thus arranged :—

لو مكلتني مكلت آل كل
 ولكن عمرك ملكي
 واراد الله هكذا
 اطلب وستننال مطالبك
 ولكن قسن مطالبك على عمرك
 وهي هاهنا
 فبكل مرامك استسنزل ايامك
 أتريد في
 الله مجيبك
 آمين

Or, as it runs in English :—

POSSESSING ME THOU SHALT POSSESS ALL THINGS.
 BUT THY LIFE IS MINE, FOR GOD HAS SO WILLED IT.
 WISH, AND THY WISHES SHALL BE FULFILLED;
 BUT MEASURE THY DESIRES, ACCORDING
 TO THE LIFE THAT IS IN THEE.
 THIS IS THY LIFE,
 WITH EACH WISH I MUST SHRINK
 EVEN AS THY OWN DAYS.
 WILT THOU HAVE ME? TAKE ME.
 GOD WILL HEARKEN UNTO THEE.
 SO BE IT!

'So you read Sanskrit fluently,' said the old man.
 'You have been in Persia perhaps, or in Bengal?'

'No, sir,' said the stranger, as he felt the emblematical skin curiously. It was almost as rigid as a sheet of metal.

The old merchant set the lamp back again upon the column, giving the other a look as he did so. 'He has given up the notion of dying already,' the glance said with phlegmatic irony.

'Is it a jest, or is it an enigma?' asked the younger man.

The other shook his head and said soberly—

'I don't know how to answer you. I have offered this talisman with its terrible powers to men with more energy in them than you seem to me to have; but though they laughed at the questionable power it might exert over their futures, not one of them was ready to venture to conclude the fateful contract proposed by an unknown force. I am of their opinion, I have doubted and refrained, and——'

'Have you never even tried its power?' interrupted the young stranger.

'Tried it!' exclaimed the old man. 'Suppose that you were on the column in the Place Vendôme, would you try flinging yourself into space? Is it possible to stay the course of life? Has a man ever been known to die by halves? Before you came here, you had made up your mind to kill yourself, but all at once a mystery fills your mind, and you think no more about death. You child! Does not any one day of your life afford mysteries more absorbing? Listen to me. I saw the licentious days of the Regency. I was like you, then, in poverty; I have begged my bread; but for all that, I am now a centenarian with a couple of years to spare, and a millionaire to boot. Misery was the making of me, ignorance has made me learned. I will tell you in a few words the great secret of human life. By two instinctive processes man exhausts the springs of life within him. Two verbs cover all the forms which these two causes of death may take—To Will and To have your Will.' Between these two limits of human activity the wise have discovered an intermediate formula, to which I

owe my good fortune and long life. To Will consumes us, and To have our Will destroys us, but To Know steeps our feeble organisms in perpetual calm. In me Thought has destroyed Will, so that Power is relegated to the ordinary functions of my economy. In a word, it is not in the heart which can be broken, nor in the senses that become deadened, but it is in the brain that cannot waste away and survives everything else, that I have set my life. Moderation has kept mind and body unruffled. Yet, I have seen the whole world. I have learned all languages, lived after every manner. I have lent a Chinaman money, taking his father's corpse as a pledge, slept in an Arab's tent on the security of his bare word, signed contracts in every capital of Europe, and left my gold without hesitation in savage wigwams. I have attained everything, because I have known how to despise all things.

My one ambition has been to see. Is not Sight in a manner Insight? And to have knowledge or insight, is not that to have instinctive possession? To be able to discover the very substance of fact and to unite its essence to our essence? Of material possession what abides with you but an idea? Think, then, how glorious must be the life of a man who can stamp all realities upon his thought, place the springs of happiness within himself, and draw thence uncounted pleasures in idea, unsoiled by earthly stains. Thought is a key to all treasures; the miser's gains are ours without his cares. Thus I have soared above this world, where my enjoyments have been intellectual joys. I have revelled in the contemplation of seas, peoples, forests, and mountains! I have seen all things, calmly, and without weariness; I have set my desires on nothing; I have waited in expectation of everything. I have walked to and fro in the world as in a garden round about my own dwelling. Troubles, loves, ambitions, losses, and sorrows, as men call them, are for me ideas, which I transmute into waking dreams; I express and transpose instead of feeling them; instead of

permitting them to prey upon my life, I dramatise and expand them; I divert myself with them as if they were romances which I could read by the power of vision within me. As I have never overtaxed my constitution, I still enjoy robust health; and as my mind is endowed with all the force that I have not wasted, this head of mine is even better furnished than my galleries. 'The true millions lie here,' he said, striking his forehead. 'I spend delicious days in communings with the past; I summon before me whole countries, places, extents of sea, the fair faces of history. In my imaginary seraglio I have all the women I have never possessed. Your wars and revolutions come up before me for judgment. What is a feverish fugitive admiration for some more or less brightly coloured piece of flesh and blood; some more or less rounded human form; what are all the disasters that wait on your erratic whims, compared with the magnificent power of conjuring up the whole world within your soul, compared with the immeasurable joys of movement, unstrangled by the cords of time, unclogged by the fetters of space; the joys of beholding all things, of comprehending all things, of leaning over the parapet of the world to question the other spheres, to hearken to the voice of God? There,' he burst out, vehemently, 'there are To Will and To have your Will, both together,' he pointed to the bit of shagreen; 'there are your social ideas, your immoderate desires, your excesses, your pleasures that end in death, your sorrows that quicken the pace of life, for pain is perhaps but a violent pleasure. Who could determine the point where pleasure becomes pain, where pain is still a pleasure? Is not the utmost brightness of the ideal world soothing to us, while the lightest shadows of the physical world annoy? Is not knowledge the secret of wisdom? And what is folly but a riotous expenditure of Will or Power?'

'Very good then, a life of riotous excess for me!' said the stranger, pouncing upon the piece of shagreen.

‘Young man, beware!’ cried the other with incredible vehemence.

‘I had resolved my existence into thought and study,’ the stranger replied; ‘and yet they have not even supported me. I am not to be gulled by a sermon worthy of Swedenborg, nor by your Oriental amulet, nor yet by your charitable endeavours to keep me in a world wherein existence is no longer possible for me. . . . Let me see now,’ he added, clutching the talisman convulsively, as he looked at the old man, ‘I wish for a royal banquet, a carouse worthy of this century, which, it is said, has brought everything to perfection! Let me have young boon companions, witty, unwarped by prejudice, merry to the verge of madness! Let one wine succeed another, each more biting and perfumed than the last, and strong enough to bring about three days of delirium! Passionate women’s forms should grace that night! I would be borne away to unknown regions beyond the confines of this world, by the car and four-winged steeds of a frantic and uproarious orgie. Let us ascend to the skies, or plunge ourselves in the mire. I do not know if one soars or sinks at such moments, and I do not care! Next, I bid this enigmatical power to concentrate all delights for me in one single joy. Yes, I must comprehend every pleasure of earth and heaven in the final embrace that is to kill me. Therefore, after the wine, I wish to hold high festival to Priapus, with songs that might rouse the dead, and kisses without end; the sound of them should pass like the crackling of flame through Paris, should revive the heat of youth and passion in husband and wife, even in hearts of seventy years.’

A laugh burst from the little old man. It rang in the young man’s ears like an echo from hell, and tyrannously cut him short. He said no more.

‘Do you imagine that my floors are going to open suddenly, so that luxuriously-appointed tables may rise through them, and guests from another world? No, no,

young madcap. You have entered into the compact now, and there is an end of it. Henceforward, your wishes will be accurately fulfilled, but at the expense of your life. The compass of your days, visible in that skin, will contract according to the strength and number of your desires, from the least to the most extravagant. The Brahmin from whom I had this skin once explained to me that it would bring about a mysterious connection between the fortunes and the wishes of its possessor. Your first wish is a vulgar one, which I could fulfil, but I leave that to the issues of your new existence. After all, you were wishing to die; very well, your suicide is only put off for a time.'

The stranger was surprised and irritated that this peculiar old man persisted in not taking him seriously. A half philanthropic intention peeped so clearly forth from his last jesting observation, that he exclaimed—

'I shall soon see, sir, if any change comes over my fortunes in the time it will take to cross the width of the quay. But I should like us to be quits for such a momentous service; that is, if you are not laughing at an unlucky wretch, so I wish that you may fall in love with an opera-dancer. You would understand the pleasures of intemperance then, and might perhaps grow lavish of the wealth that you have husbanded so philosophically.'

He went out without heeding the old man's heavy sigh, went back through the galleries and down the staircase, followed by the stout assistant who vainly tried to light his passage; he fled with the haste of a robber caught in the act. Blinded by a kind of delirium, he did not even notice the unexpected flexibility of the piece of shagreen, which coiled itself up, pliant as a glove in his excited fingers, till it would go into the pocket of his coat, where he mechanically thrust it. As he rushed out of the door into the street, he ran up against three young men who were passing arm in arm.

'Brute!'

‘Idiot!’

Such were the gratifying expressions exchanged between them.

‘Why, it is Raphael!’

‘Good! we were looking for you.’

‘What! it is you, then?’

These three friendly exclamations quickly followed the insults, as the light of a street lamp, flickering in the wind, fell upon the astonished faces of the group.

‘My dear fellow, you must come with us!’ said the young man that Raphael had all but knocked down.

‘What is all this about?’

‘Come along, and I will tell you the history of it as we go.’

By fair means or foul, Raphael must go along with his friends towards the Pont des Arts; they surrounded him, and linked him by the arm among their merry band.

‘We have been after you for about a week,’ the speaker went on. ‘At your respectable hotel *de Saint Quentin*, where, by the way, the sign with the alternate black and red letters cannot be removed, and hangs out just as it did in the time of Jean Jacques, that Leonarda of yours told us that you were off into the country. For all that, we certainly did not look like duns, creditors, sheriff’s officers, or the like. But no matter! Rastignac had seen you the evening before at the Bouffons; we took courage again, and made it a point of honour to find out whether you were roosting in a tree in the Champs-Elysées, or in one of those philanthropic abodes where the beggars sleep on a twopenny rope, or if, more lucky, you were bivouacking in some boudoir or other. We could not find you anywhere. Your name was not in the jailer’s registers at St. Pelagie nor at La Force! Government departments, *cafés*, libraries, lists of prefects’ names, newspaper offices, restaurants, greenrooms—to cut it short, every lurking place in Paris, good or bad, has been explored in the most expert manner. We bewailed

the loss of a man endowed with such genius, that one might look to find him either at Court or in the common jails. We talked of canonising you as a hero of July, and, upon my word, we regretted you !'

As he spoke, the friends were crossing the Pont des Arts. Without listening to them, Raphael looked at the Seine, at the clamouring waves that reflected the lights of Paris. Above that river, in which but now he had thought to fling himself, the old man's prediction had been fulfilled, the hour of his death had been already put back by fate.

'We really regretted you,' said his friend, still pursuing his theme. 'It was a question of a plan in which we included you as a superior person, that is to say, somebody who can put himself above other people. The constitutional thimble-rig is carried on to-day, dear boy, more seriously than ever. The infamous monarchy, displaced by the heroism of the people, was a sort of drab, you could laugh and revel with her; but La Patrie is a shrewish and virtuous wife, and willy-nilly you must take her prescribed endearments. Then besides, as you know, authority passed over from the Tuileries to the journalists, at the time when the Budget changed its quarters and went from the Faubourg Saint Germain to the Chaussée d'Antin. But this you may not know perhaps. The Government, that is, the aristocracy of lawyers and bankers who represent the country to-day, just as the priests used to do in the time of the monarchy, has felt the necessity of mystifying the worthy people of France with a few new words and old ideas, like philosophers of every school, and all strong intellects ever since time began. So now Royalist-national ideas must be inculcated, by proving to us that it is far better to pay twelve hundred million francs, thirty-three centimes to La Patrie, represented by Messieurs Such-and-Such, than to pay eleven hundred million francs, nine centimes to a king who used to say *I* instead of *we*. In a word, a

journal, with two or three hundred thousand francs, good, at the back of it, has just been started, with a view to making an opposition paper to content the discontented, without prejudice to the national government of the citizen-king. We scoff at liberty as at despotism now, and at religion or incredulity quite impartially. And since, for us, "our country" means a capital where ideas circulate and are sold at so much a line, a succulent dinner every day, and the play at frequent intervals, where profligate women swarm, where suppers last on into the next day, and light loves are hired by the hour like cabs; and since Paris will always be the most adorable of all countries, the country of joy, liberty, wit, pretty women, *mauvais sujets*, and good wine; where the truncheon of authority never makes itself disagreeably felt, because one is so close to those who wield it,—we, therefore, sectaries of the god Mephistopheles, have engaged to whitewash the public mind, to give fresh costumes to the actors, to put a new plank or two in the government booth, to doctor doctrinaires, and warm up old Republicans, to touch up the Bonapartists a bit, and revictual the Centre; provided that we are allowed to laugh *in petto* at both kings and peoples, to think one thing in the morning and another at night, and to lead a merry life *à la Panurge*, or to recline upon soft cushions, *more orientali*.

'The sceptre of this burlesque and macaronic kingdom,' he went on, 'we have reserved for you; so we are taking you straightway to a dinner given by the founder of the said newspaper, a retired banker, who, at a loss to know what to do with his money, is going to buy some brains with it. You will be welcomed as a brother, we shall hail you as king of these free lances who will undertake anything; whose perspicacity discovers the intentions of Austria, England, or Russia before either Russia, Austria, or England have formed any. Yes, we will invest you with the sovereignty of those puissant intel-

lects which give to the world its Mirabeaus, Talleyrands, Pitts, and Metternichs—all the clever Crispins who treat the destinies of a kingdom as gamblers' stakes, just as ordinary men play dominoes for *kirschenwasser*. We have given you out to be the most undaunted champion who ever wrestled in a drinking-bout at close quarters with the monster called Carousal, whom all bold spirits wish to try a fall with; we have gone so far as to say that you have never yet been worsted. I hope you will not make liars of us. Taillefer, our amphitryon, has undertaken to surpass the circumscribed saturnalias of the petty modern Lucullus. He is rich enough to infuse pomp into trifles, and style and charm into dissipation. . . . Are you listening, Raphael?' asked the orator, interrupting himself.

'Yes,' answered the young man, less surprised by the accomplishment of his wishes than by the natural manner in which the events had come about.

He could not bring himself to believe in magic, but he marvelled at the accidents of human fate.

'Yes, you say, just as if you were thinking of your grandfather's demise,' remarked one of his neighbours.

'Ah!' cried Raphael, 'I was thinking, my friends, that we are in a fair way to become very great scoundrels,' and there was an ingenuousness in his tones that set these writers, the hope of young France, in a roar. 'So far our blasphemies have been uttered over our cups; we have passed our judgments on life while drunk, and taken men and affairs in an after-dinner frame of mind. We were innocent of action; we were bold in words. But now we are to be branded with the hot iron of politics; we are going to enter the convict's prison and to drop our illusions. Although one has no belief left, except in the devil, one may regret the paradise of one's youth and the age of innocence, when we devoutly offered the tip of our tongue to some good priest for the consecrated wafer of the sacrament. Ah, my good friends, our first pecca-

dilloes gave us so much pleasure because the consequent remorse set them off and lent a keen relish to them; but nowadays——'

'Oh! now,' said the first speaker, 'there is still left——'

'What?' asked another.

'Crime——'

'There is a word as high as the gallows and deeper than the Seine,' said Raphael.

'Oh, you don't understand me; I mean political crime. Since this morning, a conspirator's life is the only one I covet. I don't know that the fancy will last over to-morrow, but to-night at least my gorge rises at the anæmic life of our civilisation and its railroad evenness. I am seized with a passion for the miseries of the retreat from Moscow, for the excitements of the Red Corsair, or for a smuggler's life. I should like to go to Botany Bay, as we have no Chartreux left us here in France; it is a sort of infirmary reserved for little Lord Byrons who, having crumpled up their lives like a serviette after dinner, have nothing left to do but to set their country ablaze, blow their own brains out, plot for a republic, or clamour for a war——'

'Emile,' Raphael's neighbour called eagerly to the speaker, 'on my honour, but for the revolution of July I would have taken orders, and gone off down into the country somewhere to lead the life of an animal, and——'

'And you would have read your Breviary through every day.'

'Yes.'

'You are a coxcomb!'

'Why, we read the newspapers as it is!'

'Not bad that, for a journalist! But hold your tongue, we are going through a crowd of subscribers. Journalism, look you, is the religion of modern society, and has even gone a little further.'

'What do you mean?'

'Its pontiffs are not obliged to believe in it any more than the people are.'

Chatting thus, like good fellows who have known their *De Viris illustribus* for years past, they reached a mansion in the Rue Joubert.

Emile was a journalist who had acquired more reputation by dint of doing nothing than others had derived from their achievements. A bold, caustic, and powerful critic, he possessed all the qualities that his defects permitted. An outspoken giber, he made numberless epigrams on a friend to his face; but would defend him, if absent, with courage and loyalty. He laughed at everything, even at his own career. Always impecunious, he yet lived, like all men of his calibre, plunged in unspeakable indolence. He would fling some word containing whole volumes in the teeth of folk who could not put a syllable of sense into their books. He lavished promises that he never fulfilled; he made a pillow of his luck and reputation, on which he slept, and ran the risk of waking up to old age in a workhouse. A steadfast friend to the gallows foot, a cynical swaggerer with a child's simplicity, a worker only from necessity or caprice.

'In the language of Maître Alcofribas, we are about to make a famous *tronçon de chière lie*,' he remarked to Raphael as he pointed out the flower-stands that made a perfumed forest of the staircase.

'I like a vestibule to be well warmed and richly carpeted,' Raphael said. 'Luxury in the peristyle is not common in France. I feel as if life had begun anew here.'

'And up above we are going to drink and make merry once more, my dear Raphael. Ah! yes,' he went on, 'and I hope we are going to come off conquerors, too, and walk over everybody else's head.'

As he spoke, he jestingly pointed to the guests. They were entering a large room which shone with gilding and lights, and there all the younger men of note in Paris welcomed them. Here was one who had just revealed

fresh powers; his first picture vied with the glories of Imperial art. There, another, who but yesterday had launched forth a volume, an acrid book filled with a sort of literary arrogance, which opened up new ways to the modern school. A sculptor, not far away, with vigorous power visible in his rough features, was chatting with one of those unenthusiastic scoffers who can either see excellence anywhere or nowhere, as it happens. Here, the cleverest of our caricaturists, with mischievous eyes and bitter tongue, lay in wait for epigrams to translate into pencil strokes; there, stood the young and audacious writer, who distilled the quintessence of political ideas better than any other man, or compressed the work of some prolific writer as he held him up to ridicule; he was talking with the poet whose works would have eclipsed all the writings of the time if his ability had been as strenuous as his hatreds. Both were trying not to say the truth while they kept clear of lies, as they exchanged flattering speeches. A famous musician administered soothing consolation in a rallying fashion, to a young politician who had just fallen, quite unhurt, from his rostrum. Young writers who lacked style stood beside other young writers who lacked ideas, and authors of poetical prose by prosaic poets.

At the sight of all these incomplete beings, a simple Saint Simonian, ingenuous enough to believe in his own doctrine, charitably paired them off, designing, no doubt, to convert them into monks of his order. A few men of science mingled in the conversation, like nitrogen in the atmosphere, and several *vaudevillistes* shed rays like the sparkling diamonds that give neither light nor heat. A few paradox-mongers, laughing up their sleeves at any folk who embraced their likes or dislikes in men or affairs, had already begun a two-edged policy, conspiring against all systems, without committing themselves to any side. Then there was the self-appointed critic who admires nothing, and will blow his nose in the middle of a

cavatina at the Bouffons, who applauds before any one else begins, and contradicts every one who says what he himself was about to say; he was there giving out the sayings of wittier men for his own. Of all the assembled guests, a future lay before some five; ten or so should acquire a fleeting renown; as for the rest, like all mediocrities, they might apply to themselves the famous falsehood of Louis XVIII., Union and oblivion.

The anxious jocularity of a man who is expending two thousand crowns sat on their host. His eyes turned impatiently towards the door from time to time, seeking one of his guests who kept him waiting. Very soon a stout little person appeared, who was greeted by a complimentary murmur; it was the notary who had invented the newspaper that very morning. A valet-de-chambre in black opened the doors of a vast dining-room, whither every one went without ceremony, and took his place at an enormous table.

Raphael took a last look round the room before he left it. His wish had been realised to the full. The rooms were adorned with silk and gold. Countless wax tapers set in handsome candelabra lit up the slightest details of gilded friezes, the delicate bronze sculpture, and the splendid colours of the furniture. The sweet scent of rare flowers, set in stands tastefully made of bamboo, filled the air. Everything, even the curtains, was pervaded by elegance without pretension, and there was a certain imaginative charm about it all which acted like a spell on the mind of a needy man.

‘An income of a hundred thousand livres a year is a very nice beginning of the catechism, and a wonderful assistance to putting morality into our actions,’ he said, sighing. ‘Truly my sort of virtue can scarcely go afoot, and vice means, to my thinking, a garret, a threadbare coat, a grey hat in winter time, and sums owing to the porter. . . . I should like to live in the lap of luxury a year, or six months, no matter! And then afterwards, die.

I should have known, exhausted, and consumed a thousand lives, at any rate.'

'Why, you are taking the tone of a stockbroker in good luck,' said Emile, who overheard him. 'Pooh! your riches would be a burden to you as soon as you found that they would spoil your chances of coming out above the rest of us. Hasn't the artist always kept the balance true between the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty? And isn't struggle a necessity to some of us? Look out for your digestion, and only look,' he added, with a mock-heroic gesture, 'at the majestic, thrice holy, and edifying appearance of this amiable capitalist's dining-room. That man has in reality only made his money for our benefit. Isn't he a kind of sponge of the polyp order, overlooked by naturalists, which should be carefully squeezed before he is left for his heirs to feed upon? There is style, isn't there, about those bas-reliefs that adorn the walls? And the lustres, and the pictures, what luxury well carried out! If one may believe those who envy him, or who know, or think they know, the origins of his life, then this man got rid of a German and some others—his best friend for one, and the mother of that friend, during the Revolution. Could you house crimes under the venerable Taillefer's silvering locks? He looks to me a very worthy man. Only see how the silver sparkles, and is every glittering ray like the stab of a dagger to him? . . . Let us go in, one might as well believe in Mahomet. If common report speak truth, here are thirty men of talent, and good fellows too, prepared to dine off the flesh and blood of a whole family; . . . and here are we ourselves, a pair of youngsters full of open-hearted enthusiasm, and we shall be partakers in his guilt. I have a mind to ask our capitalist whether he is a respectable character. . . .

'No, not now,' cried Raphael, 'but when he is dead drunk, we shall have had our dinner then.'

The two friends sat down laughing. First of all, by a

glance more rapid than a word, each paid his tribute of admiration to the splendid general effect of the long table, white as a bank of freshly-fallen snow, with its symmetrical line of covers, crowned with their pale golden rolls of bread. Rainbow colours gleamed in the starry rays of light reflected by the glass; the lights of the tapers crossed and recrossed each other indefinitely; the dishes covered with their silver domes whetted both appetite and curiosity.

Few words were spoken. Neighbours exchanged glances as the Madeira circulated. Then the first course appeared in all its glory; it would have done honour to the late Cambacerès, Brillat-Savarin would have celebrated it. The wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, white and red, were royally lavished. This first part of the banquet might have been compared in every way to a rendering of some classical tragedy. The second act grew a trifle noisier. Every guest had had a fair amount to drink, and had tried various *crûs* at his pleasure, so that as the remains of the magnificent first course were removed, tumultuous discussions began; a pale brow here and there began to flush, sundry noses took a purpler hue, faces lit up, and eyes sparkled.

While intoxication was only dawning, the conversation did not overstep the bounds of civility; but banter and *bon mots* slipped by degrees from every tongue; and then slander began to rear its little snake's head, and spoke in dulcet tones; a few shrewd ones here and there gave heed to it, hoping to keep their heads. So the second course found their minds somewhat heated. Every one ate as he spoke, spoke while he ate, and drank without heeding the quantity of the liquor, the wine was so biting, the bouquet so fragrant, the example around so infectious. Taillefer made a point of stimulating his guests, and plied them with the formidable wines of the Rhone, with fierce Tokay, and heady old Roussillon.

The champagne, impatiently expected and lavishly

poured out, was a scourge of fiery sparks to these men, released like posthorses from some mail-coach by a relay ; they let their spirits gallop away into the wilds of argument to which no one listened, began to tell stories which had no auditors, and repeatedly asked questions to which no answer was made. Only the loud voice of wassail could be heard, a voice made up of a hundred confused clamours, which rose and grew like a *crescendo* of Rossini's. Insidious toasts, swagger, and challenges followed.

Each renounced any pride in his own intellectual capacity, in order to vindicate that of hogsheads, casks, and vats ; and each made noise enough for two. A time came when the footmen smiled, while their masters all talked at once. A philosopher would have been interested, doubtless, by the singularity of the thoughts expressed, a politician would have been amazed by the incongruity of the methods discussed in that *mêlée* of words or doubtfully luminous paradoxes, where truths, grotesquely caparisoned, met in conflict across the uproar of brawling judgments, of arbitrary decisions and folly, much as bullets, shells, and grapeshot are hurled across a battlefield.

It was at once a volume and a picture. Every philosophy, religion, and moral code differing so greatly in every latitude, every government, every great achievement of the human intellect fell before a scythe as long as Time's own ; and you might have found it hard to decide whether it was wielded by Gravity intoxicated, or by Inebriation grown sober and clear-sighted. Borne away by a kind of tempest, their minds, like the sea raging against the cliffs, seemed ready to shake the laws which confine the ebb and flow of civilisations ; unconsciously fulfilling the will of God, who has suffered evil and good to abide in nature, and reserved the secret of their continual strife to Himself. A frantic travesty of debate ensued, a Walpurgis-revel of intellects. Between the dreary jests of these children of the Revolution over

the inauguration of a newspaper, and the talk of the joyous gossips at Gargantua's birth, stretched the gulf that divides the nineteenth century from the sixteenth. Laughingly they had begun the work of destruction, and our journalists laughed amid the ruins.

'What is the name of that young man over there?' said the notary, indicating Raphael. 'I thought I heard some one call him Valentin.'

'What stuff is this?' said Emile, laughing; 'plain Valentin, say you? Raphael *de* Valentin, if you please. We bear an eagle or, on a field sable, with a silver crown, beak, and claws gules, and a fine motto: *NON CECIDIT ANIMUS*. We are no foundling child, but a descendant of the Emperor Valens, of the stock of the Valentinois, founders of the cities of Valence in France, and Valencia in Spain, rightful heirs to the Empire of the East. If we suffer Mahmoud on the throne of Byzantium, it is out of pure condescension, and for lack of funds and soldiers.'

With a fork flourished above Raphael's head, Emile outlined a crown upon it. The notary bethought himself a moment, but soon fell to drinking again, with a gesture peculiar to himself; it was quite impossible, it seemed to say, to secure in his clientèle the cities of Valence and Byzantium, the Emperor Valens, Mahmoud, and the house of Valentinois.

'Should not the destruction of those ant-hills, Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, and Venice, each crushed beneath the foot of a passing giant, serve as a warning to man, vouchsafed by some mocking power?' said Claude Vignon, who must play the Bossuet, as a sort of purchased slave, at the rate of fivepence a line.

'Perhaps Moses, Sylla, Louis XI., Richelieu, Robespierre, and Napoléon were but the same man who crosses our civilisations now and again, like a comet across the sky,' said a disciple of Ballanche.

'Why try to fathom the designs of Providence?' said Canalis, maker of ballads.

‘Come, now,’ said the man who set up for a critic, ‘there is nothing more elastic in the world than your Providence.’

‘Well, sir, Louis XIV. sacrificed more lives over digging the foundations of the Maintenon’s aqueducts, than the Convention expended in order to assess the taxes justly, to make one law for everybody, and one nation of France, and to establish the rule of equal inheritance,’ said Massol, whom the lack of a syllable before his name had made a Republican.

‘Are you going to leave our heads on our shoulders?’ asked Moreau (of the Oise), a substantial farmer. ‘You, sir, who took blood for wine just now?’

‘Where is the use? Aren’t the principles of social order worth some sacrifices, sir?’

‘Hi! Bixiou! What’s-his-name, the Republican, considers a landowner’s head a sacrifice!’ said a young man to his neighbour.

‘Men and events count for nothing,’ said the Republican, following out his theory in spite of hiccoughs; ‘in politics, as in philosophy, there are only principles and ideas.’

‘What an abomination! Then you would ruthlessly put your friends to death for a shibboleth?’

‘Eh, sir! the man who feels compunction is your thorough scoundrel, for he has some notion of virtue; while Peter the Great and the Duke of Alva were embodied systems, and the pirate Monbard an organisation.’

‘But can’t Society rid itself of your systems and organisations?’ said Canalis.

‘Oh, granted!’ cried the Republican.

‘That stupid Republic of yours makes me feel queasy. We sha’n’t be able to carve a capon in peace, because we shall find the agrarian law inside it.’

‘Ah, my little Brutus, stuffed with truffles, your principles are all right enough. But you are like my valet,

the rogue is so frightfully possessed with a mania for property that if I left him to clean my clothes after his fashion, he would soon clean me out.'

'Crass idiots!' replied the Republican, 'you are for setting a nation straight with tooth-picks. To your way of thinking, justice is more dangerous than thieves.'

'Oh, dear!' cried the attorney Desroches.

'Aren't they a bore with their politics!' said the notary Cardot. 'Shut up. That's enough of it. There is no knowledge nor virtue worth shedding a drop of blood for. If Truth were brought into liquidation, we might find her insolent.'

'It would be much less trouble, no doubt, to amuse ourselves with evil, rather than dispute about good. Moreover, I would give all the speeches made for forty years past at the Tribune for a trout, for one of Perrault's tales or Charlet's sketches.'

'Quite right! . . . Hand me the asparagus. Because, after all, liberty begets anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism back again to liberty. Millions have died without securing a triumph for any one system. Is not that the vicious circle in which the whole moral world revolves? Man believes that he has reached perfection, when in fact he has but re-arranged matters.'

'Oh! oh!' cried Cursy, the *vaudevilliste*; 'in that case, gentlemen, here's to Charles x., the father of liberty.'

'Why not?' asked Emile. 'When law becomes despotic, morals are relaxed, and *vice versa*.'

'Let us drink to the imbecility of authority, which gives us such an authority over imbeciles!' said the banker.

'Napoleon left us glory, at any rate, my good friend!' exclaimed a naval officer who had never left Brest.

'Glory is a poor bargain; you buy it dear, and it will not keep. Does not the egotism of the great take the form of glory, just as for nobodies it is their own well-being?'

‘You are very fortunate, sir——’

‘The first inventor of ditches must have been a weakling, for society is only useful to the puny. The savage and the philosopher, at either extreme of the moral scale, hold property in equal horror.’

‘All very fine!’ said Cardot; ‘but if there were no property, there would be no documents to draw up.’

‘These green peas are excessively delicious!’

‘And the *curé* was found dead in his bed in the morning. . . .’

‘Who is talking about death? Pray don’t trifle, I have an uncle.’

‘Could you bear his loss with resignation?’

‘No question.’

‘Gentlemen, listen to me! HOW TO KILL AN UNCLE. Silence! (Cries of “Hush! hush!”) In the first place, take an uncle, large and stout, seventy years old at least, they are the best uncles. (Sensation.) Get him to eat a *pâté de foie gras*, any pretext will do.’

‘Ah, but my uncle is a thin, tall man, and very niggardly and abstemious.’

‘That sort of uncle is a monster; he misappropriates existence.’

‘Then,’ the speaker on uncles went on, ‘tell him, while he is digesting it, that his banker has failed.’

‘How if he bears up?’

‘Let loose a pretty girl on him.’

‘And if——?’ asked the other, with a shake of the head.

‘Then he wouldn’t be an uncle—an uncle is a gay dog by nature.’

‘Malibran has lost two notes in her voice.’

‘No, sir, she has not.’

‘Yes, sir, she has.’

‘Oh, ho! No and yes, is not that the sum-up of all religious, political, or literary dissertations? Man is a clown dancing on the edge of an abyss.’

‘You would make out that I am a fool.’

‘On the contrary, you cannot make me out.’

‘Education, there’s a pretty piece of tomfoolery. M. Heineffettermach estimates the number of printed volumes at more than a thousand millions; and a man cannot read more than a hundred and fifty thousand in his lifetime. So, just tell me what that word *education* means. For some it consists in knowing the names of Alexander’s horse, of the dog Bérécillo, of the Seigneur d’Accords, and in ignorance of the man to whom we owe the discovery of rafting and the manufacture of porcelain. For others it is the knowledge how to burn a will and live respected, be looked up to and popular, instead of stealing a watch with half-a-dozen aggravating circumstances, after a previous conviction, and so perishing, hated and dishonoured, in the Place de Grève.’

‘Will Nathan’s work live?’

‘He has very clever collaborators, sir.’

‘Or Canalis?’

‘He is a great man; let us say no more about him.’

‘You are all drunk!’

‘The consequence of a Constitution is the immediate stultification of intellects. Art, science, public works, everything, is consumed by a horribly egoistic feeling, the leprosy of the time. Three hundred of your bourgeoisie, set down on benches, will only think of planting poplars. Tyranny does great things lawlessly, while Liberty will scarcely trouble herself to do petty ones lawfully.’

‘Your reciprocal instruction will turn out counters in human flesh,’ broke in an Absolutist. ‘All individuality will disappear in a people brought to a dead level by education.’

‘For all that, is not the aim of society to secure happiness to each member of it?’ asked the Saint-Simonian.

‘If you had an income of fifty thousand livres, you would not think much about the people. If you are smitten with a tender passion for the race, go to Mada-

gascar ; there you will find a nice little nation all ready to Saint-Simonise, classify, and cork up in your phials, but here every one fits into his niche like a peg in a hole. A porter is a porter, and a blockhead is a fool, without a college of fathers to promote them to those positions.'

'You are a Carlist.'

'And why not ? Despotism pleases me ; it implies a certain contempt for the human race. I have no animosity against kings, they are so amusing. Is it nothing to sit enthroned in a room, at a distance of thirty million leagues from the sun ?'

'Let us once more take a broad view of civilisation,' said the man of learning who, for the benefit of the inattentive sculptor, had opened a discussion on primitive society and autochthonous races. 'The vigour of a nation in its origin was in a way physical, unitary, and crude ; then as aggregations increased, government advanced by a decomposition of the primitive rule, more or less skilfully managed. For example, in remote ages national strength lay in theocracy, the priest held both sword and censer ; a little later there were two priests, the pontiff and the king. To-day our society, the latest word of civilisation, has distributed power according to the number of combinations, and we come to the forces called business, thought, money, and eloquence. Authority thus divided is steadily approaching a social dissolution, with interest as its one opposing barrier. We depend no longer on either religion or physical force, but upon intellect. Can a book replace the sword ? Can discussion be a substitute for action ? That is the question.'

'Intellect has made an end of everything,' cried the Carlist. 'Come, now ! Absolute freedom has brought about national suicides ; their triumph left them as listless as an English millionaire.'

'Won't you tell us something new ? You have made fun of authority of all sorts to-day, which is every bit as vulgar as denying the existence of God. So you have no

belief left, and the century is like an old Sultan worn out by debauchery! Your Byron, in short, sings of crime and its emotions in a final despair of poetry.'

'Don't you know,' replied Bianchon, quite drunk by this time, 'that a dose of phosphorus more or less makes the man of genius or the scoundrel, a clever man or an idiot, a virtuous person or a criminal?'

'Can any one treat of virtue thus?' cried Cursy. 'Virtue, the subject of every drama at the theatre, the *dénoûment* of every play, the foundation of every court of law.' . . .

'Be quiet, you ass. You are an Achilles for virtue, without his heel,' said Bixiou.

'Some drink!'

'What will you bet that I will drink a bottle of champagne like a flash, at one pull?'

'What a flash of wit!'

'Drunk as lords,' muttered a young man gravely, trying to give some wine to his waistcoat.

'Yes, sir; real government is the art of ruling by public opinion.'

'Opinion? That is the most vicious jade of all. According to you moralists and politicians, the laws you set up are always to go before those of nature, and opinion before conscience. You are right and wrong both. Suppose society bestows down pillows on us, that benefit is made up for by the gout; and justice is likewise tempered by red-tape, and colds accompany Cashmere shawls.'

'Wretch!' Emile broke in upon the misanthrope, 'how can you slander civilisation here at table, up to the eyes in wines and exquisite dishes? Eat away at that roebuck with the gilded horns and feet, and do not carp at your mother. . . .'

'Is it any fault of mine if Catholicism puts a million deities in a sack of flour, that Republics will end in a Napoleon, that monarchy dwells between the assassination

of Henry IV. and the trial of Louis XVI., and Liberalism produces La Fayette?'

'Didn't you embrace him in July?'

'No.'

'Then hold your tongue, you sceptic.'

'Sceptics are the most conscientious of men.'

'They have no conscience.'

'What are you saying? They have two a piece at least!'

'So you want to discount heaven, a thoroughly commercial notion. Ancient religions were but the unchecked development of physical pleasure, but we have developed a soul and expectations; some advance has been made.'

'What can you expect, my friends, of a century filled with politics to repletion?' asked Nathan. 'What befell *The History of the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles*, a most entrancing conception? . . .'

'I say,' the would-be critic cried down the whole length of the table. 'The phrases might have been drawn at haphazard from a hat, 'twas a work written "down to Charenton."''

'You are a fool!'

'And you are a rogue!'

'Oh! oh!'

'Ah! ah!'

'They are going to fight.'

'No, they aren't.'

'You will find me to-morrow, sir.'

'This very moment,' Nathan answered.

'Come, come, you pair of fire-eaters!'

'You are another!' said the prime mover in the quarrel.

'They can hardly stand on their legs.'

'Ah, I can't stand upright, perhaps?' asked the pugnacious Nathan, straightening himself up like a stag-beetle about to fly.

He stared stupidly round the table, then completely exhausted by the effort, sank back into his chair, and mutely hung his head. •

'Would it not have been nice,' the critic said to his neighbour, 'to fight about a book I have neither read nor seen?'

'Emile, look out for your coat, your neighbour is growing pale,' said Bixiou.

'Kant? Yet another ball flung out for fools to sport with, sir! Materialism and spiritualism are a fine pair of battledores with which charlatans in long gowns keep a shuttle-cock a-going. Suppose that God is everywhere, as Spinoza says, or that all things proceed from God, as says St. Paul . . . the nincompoops, the door shuts or opens, but isn't the movement the same? Does the fowl come from the egg, or the egg from the fowl? . . . Just hand me some duck . . . and there, you have all science.'

'Simpleton!' cried the man of science, 'your problem is settled by fact!'

'What fact?'

'Professors' chairs were not made for philosophy, but philosophy for the professors' chairs. Put on a pair of spectacles and read the budget.'

'Thieves!'

'Nincompoops!'

'Knaves!'

'Gulls!'

'Where but in Paris will you find such a ready and rapid exchange of thought?' cried Bixiou in a deep, bass voice.

'Bixiou! Act a classical farce for us! Come, now.'

'Would you like me to depict the nineteenth century?'

'Silence.'

'Pay attention.'

'Clap a muffle on your trumpets.'

'Shut up, you Turk!'

'Give him some wine, and let that fellow keep quiet.'

'Now, then, Bixiou!'

The artist buttoned his black coat to the collar, put on yellow gloves, and began to burlesque the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by acting a squinting old lady; but the uproar

drowned his voice, and no one heard a word of the satire. Still, if he did not catch the spirit of the century, he represented the *Revue* at any rate, for his own intentions were not very clear to him.

Dessert was served as if by magic. A huge epergne of gilded bronze from Thomire's studio overshadowed the table. Tall statuettes, which a celebrated artist had endowed with ideal beauty according to conventional European notions, sustained and carried pyramids of strawberries, pines, fresh dates, golden grapes, clear-skinned peaches, oranges brought from Setubal by steamer, pomegranates, Chinese fruit; in short, all the surprises of luxury, miracles of confectionery, the most tempting dainties, and choicest delicacies. The colouring of this epicurean work of art was enhanced by the splendours of porcelain, by sparkling outlines of gold, by the chasing of the vases. Poussin's landscapes, copied on Sèvres ware, were crowned with graceful fringes of moss, green, translucent, and fragile as ocean weeds.

The revenue of a German prince would not have defrayed the cost of this arrogant display. Silver and mother-of-pearl, gold and crystal, were lavished afresh in new forms; but scarcely a vague idea of this almost Oriental fairyland penetrated eyes now heavy with wine, or crossed the delirium of intoxication. The fire and fragrance of the wines acted like potent philtres and magical fumes, producing a kind of mirage in the brain, binding feet, and weighing down hands. The pyramids of fruit were ransacked, voices grew thicker, the clamour increased. Words were no longer distinct, glasses flew in pieces, senseless peals of laughter broke out. Cursy snatched up a horn and struck up a flourish on it. It acted like a signal given by the devil. Yells, hisses, songs, cries, and groans went up from the maddened crew. You might have smiled to see men, light-hearted by nature, grow tragical as Crébillon's dramas, and pensive as a sailor in a coach. Hard-headed men blabbed secrets

to the inquisitive, who were long past heeding them. Saturnine faces were wreathed in smiles worthy of a pirouetting dancer. Claude Vignon shuffled about like a bear in a cage. Intimate friends began to fight.

Animal likenesses, so curiously traced by physiologists in human faces, came out in gestures and behaviour. A book lay open for a Bichat if he had repaired thither fasting and collected. The master of the house, knowing his condition, did not dare to stir, but encouraged his guests' extravagances with a fixed grimacing smile, meant to be hospitable and appropriate. His large face, turning from blue and red to a purple shade terrible to see, partook of the general commotion by movements like the heaving and pitching of a brig.

'Now, did you murder them?' Emile asked him.

'Capital punishment is going to be abolished, they say, in favour of the Revolution of July,' answered Taillefer, raising his eyebrows with drunken sagacity.

'Don't they rise up before you in dreams at times?' Raphael persisted.

'There's a statute of limitations,' said the murderer—
Cræsus.

'And on his tombstone,' Emile began, with a sardonic laugh, 'the stone-mason will carve "Passer-by, accord a tear, in memory of one that's here!" Oh,' he continued, 'I would cheerfully pay a hundred sous to any mathematician who would prove the existence of hell to me by an algebraical equation.'

He flung up a coin and cried—

'Heads for the existence of God!'

'Don't look!' Raphael cried, pouncing upon it. 'Who knows? Suspense is so pleasant.'

'Unluckily,' Emile said, with burlesque melancholy, 'I can see no halting-place between the unbeliever's arithmetic and the papal *Pater noster*. Pshaw! let us drink. *Tring* was, I believe, the oracular answer of the *dive bouteille* and the final conclusion of *Pantagruel*.'

‘We owe our arts and monuments to the *Pater noster*, and our knowledge, too, perhaps; and a still greater benefit—modern government—whereby a vast and teeming society is wondrously represented by some five hundred intellects. It neutralises opposing forces and gives free play to CIVILISATION, that Titan queen who has succeeded the ancient terrible figure of the KING, that sham Providence, reared by man between himself and heaven. In the face of such achievements, atheism seems like a barren skeleton. What do you say?’

‘I am thinking of the seas of blood shed by Catholicism,’ Emile replied, quite unimpressed. ‘It has drained our hearts and veins dry to make a mimic deluge. No matter! Every man who thinks must range himself beneath the banner of Christ, for He alone has consummated the triumph of spirit over matter; He alone has revealed to us, like a poet, an intermediate world that separates us from the Deity.’

‘Believest thou?’ asked Raphael with an unaccountable drunken smile. ‘Very good; we must not commit ourselves; so we will drink the celebrated toast, *Diis ignotis!*’

And they drained the chalice filled up with science, carbonic acid gas, perfumes, poetry, and incredulity.

‘If the gentlemen will go to the drawing-room, coffee is ready for them,’ said the major-domo.

There was scarcely one of those present whose mind was not floundering by this time in the delights of chaos, where every spark of intelligence is quenched, and the body, set free from its tyranny, gives itself up to the frenetic joys of liberty. Some who had arrived at the apogee of intoxication were dejected, as they painfully tried to arrest a single thought which might assure them of their own existence; others, deep in the heavy morasses of indigestion, denied the possibility of movement. The noisy and the silent were oddly assorted.

For all that, when new joys were announced to them

by the stentorian tones of the servant, who spoke on his master's behalf, they all rose, leaning upon, dragging or carrying one another. But on the threshold of the room the entire crew paused for a moment, motionless, as if fascinated. The intemperate pleasures of the banquet seemed to fade away at this titillating spectacle, prepared by their amphitryon to appeal to the most sensual of their instincts.

Beneath the shining wax-lights in a golden chandelier, round about a table inlaid with gilded metal, a group of women, whose eyes shone like diamonds, suddenly met the stupefied stare of the revellers. Their toilettes were splendid, but less magnificent than their beauty, which eclipsed the other marvels of this palace. A light shone from their eyes, bewitching as those of sirens, more brilliant and ardent than the blaze that streamed down upon the snowy marble, the delicately carved surfaces of bronze, and lit up the satin sheen of the tapestry. The contrasts of their attitudes and the slight movements of their heads, each differing in character and nature of attraction, set the heart afire. It was like a thicket, where blossoms mingled with rubies, sapphires, and coral; a combination of gossamer scarves that flickered like beacon-lights; of black ribbons about snowy throats; of gorgeous turbans and demurely enticing apparel. It was a seraglio that appealed to every eye, and fulfilled every fancy. Each form posed to admiration was scarcely concealed by the folds of cashmere, and half hidden, half revealed by transparent gauze and diaphanous silk. The little slender feet were eloquent, though the fresh red lips uttered no sound.

Demure and fragile-looking girls, pictures of maidenly innocence, with a semblance of conventual unction about their heads, were there like apparitions that a breath might dissipate. Aristocratic beauties with haughty glances; languid, flexible, slender, and complaisant, bent their heads as though there were royal protectors still in the market. An Englishwoman seemed like a spirit of mel-

ancholy—some coy, pale, shadowy form among Ossian's mists, or a type of remorse flying from crime. The Parisienne was not wanting in all her beauty that consists in an indescribable charm; armed with her irresistible weakness, vain of her costume and her wit, pliant and hard, a heartless, passionless siren that yet can create factitious treasures of passion and counterfeit emotion.

Italians shone in the throng, serene and self-possessed in their bliss; handsome Normans, with splendid figures; women of the south, with black hair and well-shaped eyes. Lebel might have summoned together all the fair women of Versailles, who since morning had perfected all their wiles, and now came like a troupe of Oriental women, bidden by the slave merchant to be ready to set out at dawn. They stood disconcerted and confused about the table, huddled together in a murmuring group like bees in a hive. The combination of timid embarrassment with coquettishness and a sort of expostulation was the result either of calculated effect or a spontaneous modesty. Perhaps a sentiment of which women are never utterly divested prescribed to them the cloak of modesty to heighten and enhance the charms of wantonness. So the venerable Taillefer's designs seemed on the point of collapse, for these unbridled natures were subdued from the very first by the majesty with which woman is invested. There was a murmur of admiration, which vibrated like a soft musical note. Wine had not taken love for travelling companion; instead of a violent tumult of passions, the guests thus taken by surprise, in a moment of weakness, gave themselves up to luxurious raptures of delight.

Artists obeyed the voice of poetry which constrains them, and studied with pleasure the different delicate tints of these chosen examples of beauty. Sobered by a thought perhaps due to some emanation from a bubble of carbonic acid in the champagne, a philosopher shuddered at the misfortunes which had brought these women, once perhaps worthy of the truest devotion, to this. Each one

doubtless could have unfolded a cruel tragedy. Infernal tortures followed in the train of most of them, and they drew after them faithless men, broken vows, and pleasures atoned for in wretchedness. Polite advances were made by the guests, and conversations began, as varied in character as the speakers. They broke up into groups. It might have been a fashionable drawing-room where ladies and young girls offer after dinner the assistance that coffee, liqueurs, and sugar afford to diners who are struggling in the toils of a perverse digestion. But in a little while laughter broke out, the murmur grew, and voices were raised. The saturnalia, subdued for a moment, threatened at times to renew itself. The alternations of sound and silence bore a distant resemblance to a symphony of Beethoven's.

The two friends, seated on a silken divan, were first approached by a tall, well-proportioned girl of stately bearing; her features were irregular, but her face was striking and vehement in expression, and impressed the mind by the vigour of its contrasts. Her dark hair fell in luxuriant curls, with which some hand seemed to have played havoc already, for the locks fell lightly over the splendid shoulders that thus attracted attention. The long brown curls half hid her queenly throat, though where the light fell upon it, the delicacy of its fine outlines was revealed. Her warm and vivid colouring was set off by the dead white of her complexion. Bold and ardent glances came from under the long eyelashes; the damp, red, half-open lips challenged a kiss. Her frame was strong but compliant; with a bust and arms strongly developed, as in figures drawn by the Caracci, she yet seemed active and elastic, with a panther's strength and suppleness, and in the same way the energetic grace of her figure suggested fierce pleasures.

But though she might romp perhaps and laugh, there was something terrible in her eyes and her smile. Like a pythoness possessed by the demon, she inspired fear

rather than pleasure. All changes, one after another, flashed like lightning over every mobile feature of her face. She might captivate a jaded fancy, but a young man would have feared her. She was like some colossal statue fallen from the height of a Greek temple, so grand when seen afar, too roughly hewn to be seen anear. And yet, in spite of all, her terrible beauty could have stimulated exhaustion; her voice might charm the deaf; her glances might put life into the bones of the dead; and therefore Emile was vaguely reminded of one of Shakespeare's tragedies—a wonderful maze, in which joy groans, and there is something wild even about love, and the magic of forgiveness and the warmth of happiness succeed to cruel storms of rage. She was a siren that can both kiss and devour; laugh like a devil, or weep as angels can. She could concentrate in one instant all a woman's powers of attraction in a single effort (the sighs of melancholy and the charms of maiden's shyness alone excepted), then in a moment rise in fury like a nation in revolt, and tear herself, her passion, and her lover, in pieces.

Dressed in red velvet, she trampled under her reckless feet the stray flowers fallen from other heads, and held out a salver to the two friends, with careless hands. The white arms stood out in bold relief against the velvet. Proud of her beauty; proud (who knows?) of her corruption, she stood like a queen of pleasure, like an incarnation of enjoyment; the enjoyment that comes of squandering the accumulations of three generations; that scoffs at its progenitors, and makes merry over a corpse; that will dissolve pearls and wreck thrones, turn old men into boys, and make young men prematurely old; enjoyment only possible to giants weary of their power, tormented by reflection, or for whom strife has become a plaything.

'What is your name?' asked Raphael.

'Aquilina.'

'Out of *Venice Preserved!*' exclaimed Emile.

'Yes,' she answered. 'Just as a pope takes a new name when he is exalted above all other men, I, too, took another name when I raised myself above women's level.'

'Then have you, like your patron saint, a terrible and noble lover, a conspirator, who would die for you?' cried Emile eagerly—this gleam of poetry had aroused his interest.

'Once I had,' she answered. 'But I had a rival too in La Guillotine. I have worn something red about me ever since, lest any happiness should carry me away.'

'Oh, if you are going to get her on to the story of those four lads of La Rochelle, she will never get to the end of it. That's enough, Aquilina. As if every woman could not bewail some lover or other, though not every one has the luck to lose him on the scaffold, as you have done. I would a great deal sooner see a lover of mine in a trench at the back of Clamart than in a rival's arms.'

All this in the gentlest and most melodious accents, and pronounced by the prettiest, gentlest, and most innocent-looking little person that a fairy wand ever drew from an enchanted eggshell. She had come up noiselessly, and they became aware of a slender, dainty figure, charmingly timid blue eyes, and white transparent brows. No *ingénue* among the naiads, a truant from her river spring, could have been shyer, whiter, more ingenuous, than this young girl, seemingly about sixteen years old, ignorant of evil and of the storms of life, and fresh from some church in which she must have prayed the angels to call her to heaven before the time. Only in Paris are such natures as this to be found, concealing depths of depravity behind a fair mask, and the most artificial vices beneath a brow as young and fair as an opening flower.

At first the angelic promise of those soft lineaments misled the friends. Raphael and Emile took the coffee which she poured into the cups brought by Aquilina, and began to talk with her. In the eyes of the two poets she soon became transformed into some sombre allegory,

of I know not what aspect of human life. She opposed to the vigorous and ardent expression of her commanding acquaintance a revelation of heartless corruption and voluptuous cruelty. Heedless enough to perpetrate a crime, hardy enough to feel no misgivings; a pitiless demon that wrings larger and kinder natures with torments that it is incapable of knowing, that simpers over a traffic in love, sheds tears over a victim's funeral, and beams with joy over the reading of the will. A poet might have admired the magnificent Aquilina; but the winning Euphrasia must be repulsive to every one—the first was the soul of sin; the second, sin without a soul in it.

‘I should dearly like to know,’ Emile remarked to this pleasing being, ‘if you ever reflect upon your future?’

‘My future!’ she answered with a laugh. ‘What do you mean by my future? Why should I think about something that does not exist as yet? I never look before or behind. Isn't one day at a time more than I can concern myself with as it is? And besides, the future, as we know, means the hospital.’

‘How can you foresee a future in the hospital, and make no effort to avert it?’

‘What is there so alarming about the hospital?’ asked the terrific Aquilina. ‘When we are neither wives nor mothers, when old age draws black stockings over our limbs, sets wrinkles on our brows, withers up the woman in us, and darkens the light in our lover's eyes, what could we need when that comes to pass? You would look on us then as mere human clay; we with our habiliments shall be for you like so much mud—worthless, lifeless, crumbling to pieces, going about with the rustle of dead leaves. Rags or the daintiest finery will be as one to us then; the ambergris of the boudoir will breathe an odour of death and dry bones; and suppose there is a heart there in that mud, not one of you but would make mock of it, not so much as a memory will you spare to

us. Is not our existence precisely the same whether we live in a fine mansion with lap-dogs to tend, or sort rags in a workhouse? Does it make much difference whether we shall hide our grey heads beneath lace or a handkerchief striped with blue and red; whether we sweep a crossing with a birch broom, or the steps of the Tuileries with satins; whether we sit beside a gilded hearth, or cower over the ashes in a red earthen pot; whether we go to the Opera or look on in the Place de Grève?’

‘*Aquilina mia*, you have never shown more sense than in this depressing fit of yours,’ Euphrasia remarked. ‘Yes, Cashmere, *point d’Alençon*, perfumes, gold, silks, luxury, everything that sparkles, everything pleasant, belongs to youth alone. Time alone may show us our folly, but good fortune will acquit us. You are laughing at me,’ she went on, with a malicious glance at the friends; ‘but am I not right? I would sooner die of pleasure than of illness. I am not afflicted with a mania for perpetuity, nor have I a great veneration for human nature, such as God has made it. Give me millions, and I would squander them; I should not keep one centime for the year to come. Live to be charming and have power, that is the decree of my every heart-beat. Society sanctions my life; does it not pay for my extravagances? Why does Providence pay me every morning my income, which I spend every evening? Why are hospitals built for us? And Providence did not put good and evil on either hand for us to select what tires and pains us. I should be very foolish if I did not amuse myself.’

‘And how about others?’ asked Emile.

‘Others? Oh, well, they must manage for themselves. I prefer laughing at their woes to weeping over my own. I defy any man to give me the slightest uneasiness.’

‘What have you suffered to make you think like this?’ asked Raphael.

‘I myself have been forsaken for an inheritance,’ she said, striking an attitude that displayed all her charms;

‘and yet I had worked night and day to keep my lover ! I am not to be gulled by any smile or vow, and I have set myself to make one long entertainment of my life.’

‘But does not happiness come from the soul within ?’ cried Raphael.

‘It may be so,’ Aquilina answered ; ‘but is it nothing to be conscious of admiration and flattery ; to triumph over other women, even over the most virtuous, humiliating them before our beauty and our splendour ? Not only so ; one day of our life is worth ten years of a *bourgeoise* existence, and so it is all summed up.’

‘Is not a woman hateful without virtue ?’ Emile said to Raphael.

Euphrasia’s glance was like a viper’s, as she said with an irony in her voice that cannot be rendered—

‘Virtue ! we leave that to deformity and to ugly women. What would the poor things be without it ?’

‘Hush, be quiet,’ Emile broke in. ‘Don’t talk about something you have never known.’

‘That I have never known !’ Euphrasia answered. ‘You give yourself for life to some person you abominate ; you must bring up children who will neglect you, who wound your very heart, and you must say, “Thank you !” for it ; and these are the virtues you prescribe to woman. And that is not enough. By way of requiting her self-denial, you must come and add to her sorrows by trying to lead her astray ; and though you are rebuffed, she is compromised. A nice life ! How far better to keep one’s freedom, to follow one’s inclinations in love, and die young.’

‘Have you no fear of the price to be paid some day for all this ?’

‘Even then,’ she said, ‘instead of mingling pleasures and troubles, my life will consist of two separate parts— a youth of happiness is secure, and there may come a hazy, uncertain old age, during which I can suffer at my leisure.’

'She has never loved,' came in the deep tones of Aquilina's voice. 'She never went a hundred leagues to drink in one look and a denial with untold raptures. She has not hung her own life on a thread, nor tried to stab more than one man to save her sovereign lord, her king, her divinity. . . . Love, for her, meant a fascinating colonel.'

'Here she is with her La Rochelle,' Euphrasia made answer. 'Love comes like the wind, no one knows whence. And, for that matter, if one of those brutes had once fallen in love with you, you would hold sensible men in horror.'

'Brutes are put out of the question by the Code,' said the tall, sarcastic Aquilina.

'I thought you had more kindness for the army,' laughed Euphrasia.

'How happy they are in their power of dethroning their reason in this way,' Raphael exclaimed.

'Happy?' asked Aquilina, with a dreadful look, and a smile full of pity and terror. 'Ah, you do not know what it is to be condemned to a life of pleasure, with your dead hidden in your heart. . . .'

A moment's consideration of the rooms was like a foretaste of Milton's Pandemonium. The faces of those still capable of drinking were a hideous blue tint, from burning draughts of punch. Mad dances were kept up with wild energy, excited laughter and outcries broke out like the explosion of fireworks. The boudoir and a small adjoining room were strewn like a battlefield with the insensible and incapable. Wine, pleasure, and dispute had heated the atmosphere. Wine and love, delirium and unconsciousness possessed them, and were written upon all faces, upon the furniture; were expressed by the surrounding disorder, and brought light films over the vision of those assembled, so that the air seemed full of intoxicating vapour. A glittering dust arose, as in the luminous paths made by a ray of sunlight, the most bizarre forms flitted through it, grotesque struggles were seen athwart it. Groups of

interlaced figures blended with the white marbles, the noble masterpieces of sculpture that adorned the rooms.

Though the two friends yet preserved a sort of fallacious clearness in their ideas and voices, a feeble appearance and faint thrill of animation, it was yet almost impossible to distinguish what was real among the fantastic absurdities before them, or what foundation there was for the impossible pictures that passed unceasingly before their weary eyes. The strangest phenomena of dreams beset them, the lowering heavens, the fervid sweetness caught by faces in our visions, and unheard-of agility under a load of chains,—all these so vividly, that they took the pranks of the orgy about them for the freaks of some nightmare in which all movement is silent, and cries never reach the ear. The *valet de chambre* succeeded just then, after some little difficulty, in drawing his master into the ante-chamber to whisper to him—

‘The neighbours are all at their windows, complaining of the racket, sir.’

‘If noise alarms them, why don’t they lay down straw before their doors?’ was Taillefer’s rejoinder.

Raphael’s sudden burst of laughter was so unseasonable and abrupt, that his friend demanded the reason of his unseemly hilarity.

‘You will hardly understand me,’ he replied. ‘In the first place, I must admit that you stopped me on the Quai Voltaire just as I was about to throw myself into the Seine, and you would like to know, no doubt, my motives for dying. And when I proceed to tell you that by an almost miraculous chance the most poetic memorials of the material world had but just then been summed up for me as a symbolical interpretation of human wisdom; whilst at this minute the remains of all the intellectual treasures ravaged by us at table are comprised in these two women, the living and authentic types of folly, would you be any the wiser? Our profound apathy towards men and things supplied the half-tones in a crudely con-

trasted picture of two theories of life so diametrically opposed. If you were not drunk, you might perhaps catch a gleam of philosophy in this.'

'And if you had not both feet on that fascinating Aquilina, whose heavy breathing suggests an analogy with the sounds of a storm about to burst,' replied Emile, absently engaged in the harmless amusement of winding and unwinding Euphrasia's hair, 'you would be ashamed of your inebriated garrulity. Both your systems can be packed in a phrase, and reduced to a single idea. The mere routine of living brings a stupid kind of wisdom with it, by blunting our intelligence with work; and on the other hand, a life passed in the limbo of the abstract, or in the abysses of the moral world, produces a sort of wisdom run mad. The conditions may be summed up in brief; we may extinguish emotion, and so live to old age, or we may choose to die young as martyrs to contending passions. And yet this decree is at variance with the temperaments with which we were endowed by the bitter jester who modelled all creatures.'

'Idiot!' Raphael burst in. 'Go on epitomising yourself after that fashion, and you will fill volumes. If I attempted to formulate those two ideas clearly, I might as well say that man is corrupted by the exercise of his wits, and purified by ignorance. You are calling the whole fabric of society to account. But whether we live with the wise or perish with the fool, isn't the result the same sooner or later? And have not the prime constituents of the quintessence of both systems been before expressed in a couple of words—*Carymary, carymara*.'

'You make me doubt the existence of a God, for your stupidity is greater than His power,' said Emile. 'Our beloved Rabelais summed it all up in a shorter word than your "*Carymary, carymara*;" from his *Peut-être* Montaigne derived his own *Que sais-je?* After all, this last word of moral science is scarcely more than the cry of

Pyrrhus set betwixt good and evil, or Buridan's ass between the two measures of oats. But let this everlasting question alone, resolved to-day by a "Yes" and a "No." What experience did you look to find by a jump into the Seine? Were you jealous of the hydraulic machine on the Pont Nôtre Dame?

'Ah, if you but knew my history!'

'Pooh,' said Emile; 'I did not think you could be so commonplace; that remark is hackneyed. Don't you know that every one of us claims to have suffered as no other ever did?'

'Ah!' Raphael sighed.

'What a mountebank art thou with thy "Ah"! Look here, now! Does some disease of mind or body, by contracting your muscles, bring back of a morning the wild horses that tear you in pieces at night, as with Damiens once upon a time? Were you driven to sup off your own dog in a garret, uncooked and without salt? Have your children ever cried, "I am hungry"? Have you sold your mistress's hair to hazard the money at play? Have you ever drawn a sham bill of exchange on a fictitious uncle at a sham address, and feared lest you should not be in time to take it up? Come now, I am attending! If you were going to drown yourself for some woman, or by way of a protest, or out of sheer dulness, I disown you. Make your confession, and no lies! I don't at all want a historical memoir. And, above all things, be as concise as your clouded intellect permits; I am as critical as a professor, and as sleepy as a woman at her vespers.'

'You silly fool!' said Raphael. 'When has not suffering been keener for a more susceptible nature? Some day when science has attained to a pitch that enables us to study the natural history of hearts, when they are named and classified in genera, sub-genera, and families; into crustaceæ, fossils, saurians, infusoria, or whatever it is,—then, my dear fellow, it will be ascer-

tained that there are natures as tender and fragile as flowers, that are broken by the slight bruises that some stony hearts do not even feel——'

'For pity's sake, spare me thy exordium,' said Emile, as, half plaintive, half amused, he took Raphael's hand.



A WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART

AFTER a moment's silence, Raphael said with a careless gesture—

‘Perhaps it is an effect of the fumes of punch—I really cannot tell—this clearness of mind that enables me to comprise my whole life in a single picture, where figures and hues, lights, shades, and half-tones are faithfully rendered. I should not have been so surprised at this poetical play of imagination if it were not accompanied with a sort of scorn for my past joys and sorrows. Seen from afar, my life appears to contract by some mental process. That long, slow agony of ten years’ duration can be brought to memory to-day in some few phrases, in which pain is resolved into a mere idea, and pleasure becomes a philosophical reflection. Instead of feeling things, I weigh and consider them——’

‘You are as tiresome as the explanation of an amendment,’ cried Emile.

‘Very likely,’ said Raphael submissively. ‘I spare you the first seventeen years of my life for fear of abusing a listener’s patience. Till that time, like you and thousands of others, I had lived my life at school or the *lycée*, with its imaginary troubles and genuine happinesses, which are so pleasant to look back upon. Our jaded palates still crave for that Lenten fare, so long as we have not tried it afresh. It was a pleasant life, with the tasks that we thought so contemptible, but which taught us application for all that. . . .’

‘Let the drama begin,’ said Emile, half-plaintively, half-comically.

‘When I left school,’ Raphael went on, with a gesture

that claimed the right of speaking, 'my father submitted me to a strict discipline; he installed me in a room near his own study, and I had to rise at five in the morning and be in bed by nine at night. He meant me to take my law studies seriously. I attended the Schools, and read with an advocate as well; but my lectures and work were so narrowly circumscribed by the laws of time and space, and my father required such a strict account of my doings, at dinner, that . . .'

'What is this to me?' asked Emile.

'The devil take you!' said Raphael. 'How are you to enter into my feelings if I do not relate the facts that insensibly shaped my character, made me timid, and prolonged the period of youthful simplicity? In this manner I cowered under as strict a despotism as a monarch's till I came of age. To depict the tedium of my life, it will be perhaps enough to portray my father for you. He was tall, thin, and slight, with a hatchet face, and pale complexion; a man of few words, fidgety as an old maid, exacting as a senior clerk. His paternal solicitude hovered over my merriment and gleeful thoughts, and seemed to cover them with a leaden pall. Any effusive demonstration on my part was received by him as a childish absurdity. I was far more afraid of him than I had been of any of our masters at school.

'I seem to see him before me at this moment. In his chestnut-brown frock-coat he looked like a red herring wrapped up in the cover of a pamphlet, and he held himself as erect as an Easter candle. But I was fond of my father, and at heart he was right enough. Perhaps we never hate severity when it has its source in greatness of character and pure morals, and is skilfully tempered with kindness. My father, it is true, never left me a moment to myself, and only when I was twenty years old gave me so much as ten francs of my own, ten knavish prodigals of francs, such a hoard as I had long vainly desired, which set me a-dreaming of unutterable felicity; yet, for all that, he sought to procure relaxations for me. When

he had promised me a treat months beforehand, he would take me to Les Bouffons, or to a concert or ball, where I hoped to find a mistress. . . . A mistress ! that meant independence. But bashful and timid as I was, knowing nobody, and ignorant of the dialect of drawing-rooms, I always came back as awkward as ever, and swelling with unsatisfied desires, to be put in harness like a troop horse next day by my father, and to return with morning to my advocate, the Palais de Justice, and the law. To have swerved from the straight course which my father had mapped out for me, would have drawn down his wrath upon me ; at my first delinquency, he threatened to ship me off as a cabin-boy to the Antilles. A dreadful shiver ran through me if I had ventured to spend a couple of hours in some pleasure party.

‘Imagine the most wandering imagination and passionate temperament, the tenderest soul and most artistic nature, dwelling continually in the presence of the most flint-hearted, atrabilious, and frigid man on earth ; think of me as a young girl married to a skeleton, and you will understand the life whose curious scenes can only be a hearsay tale to you ; the plans for running away that perished at the sight of my father, the despair soothed by slumber, the dark broodings charmed away by music. I breathed my sorrows forth in melodies. Beethoven or Mozart would keep my confidences sacred. Nowadays, I smile at recollections of the scruples which burdened my conscience at that epoch of innocence and virtue.

‘If I set foot in a restaurant, I gave myself up for lost ; my fancy led me to look on a café as a disreputable haunt, where men lost their characters and embarrassed their fortunes ; as for engaging in play, I had not the money to risk. Oh, if I needed to send you to sleep, I would tell you about one of the most frightful pleasures of my life, one of those pleasures with fangs that bury themselves in the heart as the branding-iron enters the convict’s shoulder. I was at a ball at the house of the Duc de Navarreins, my father’s cousin. But to make

my position the more perfectly clear, you must know that I wore a threadbare coat, ill-fitting shoes, a tie fit for a stableman, and a soiled pair of gloves. I shrank into a corner to eat ices and watch the pretty faces at my leisure. My father noticed me. Actuated by some motive that I did not fathom, so dumbfounded was I by this act of confidence, he handed me his keys and purse to keep. Ten paces away some men were gambling. I heard the rattling of gold; I was twenty years old; I longed to be steeped for one whole day in the follies of my time of life. It was a licence of the imagination that would find a parallel neither in the freaks of courtesans, nor in the dreams of young girls. For a year past I had beheld myself well dressed, in a carriage, with a pretty woman by my side, playing the great lord, dining at Véry's, deciding not to go back home till the morrow; but was prepared for my father with a plot more intricate than the *Marriage of Figaro*, which he could not possibly have unravelled. All this bliss would cost, I estimated, fifty crowns. Was it not the artless idea of playing truant that still had charms for me?

'I went into a small adjoining room, and when alone counted my father's money with smarting eyes and trembling fingers—a hundred crowns! The joys of my escapade rose before me at the thought of the amount; joys that flitted about me like Macbeth's witches round their caldron; joys how alluring! how thrilling! how delicious! I became a deliberate rascal. I heeded neither my tingling ears nor the violent beating of my heart, but took out two twenty-franc pieces that I seem to see yet. The dates had been erased, and Bonaparte's head simpered upon them. After I had put back the purse in my pocket, I returned to a gaming-table with the two pieces of gold in the palms of my damp hands, prowling about the players like a sparrow-hawk round a coop of chickens. Tormented by inexpressible terror, I flung a sudden clairvoyant glance round me, and feeling quite sure that I was seen by none of my acquaintance,

betted on a stout, jovial little man, heaping upon his head more prayers and vows than are put up during two or three storms at sea. Then, with an intuitive scoundrelism, or Machiavelism, surprising in one of my age, I went and stood in the door, and looked about me in the rooms, though I saw nothing; for both mind and eyes hovered about that fateful green cloth.

‘That evening fixes the date of a first observation of a physiological kind; to it I owe a kind of insight into certain mysteries of our double nature that I have since been enabled to penetrate. I had my back turned on the table where my future felicity lay at stake, a felicity but so much the more intense that it was criminal. Between me and the players stood a wall of onlookers some five deep, who were chatting; the murmur of voices drowned the clinking of gold, which mingled in the sounds sent up by this orchestra; yet, despite all obstacles, I distinctly heard the words of the two players by a gift accorded to the passions, which enables them to annihilate time and space. I saw the points they made; I knew which of the two turned up the king as well as if I had actually seen the cards; at a distance of ten paces, in short, the fortunes of play blanched my face.

‘My father suddenly went by, and then I knew what the Scripture meant by “The Spirit of God passed before his face.” I had won. I slipped through the crowd of men who had gathered about the players with the quickness of an eel escaping through a broken mesh in a net. My nerves thrilled with joy instead of anguish. I felt like some criminal on the way to torture released by a chance meeting with the king. It happened that a man with a decoration found himself short by forty francs. Uneasy eyes suspected me; I turned pale, and drops of perspiration stood on my forehead. I was well punished, I thought, for having robbed my father. Then the kind little stout man said, in a voice like an angel’s surely, “All these gentlemen have paid their stakes,” and put down the forty francs himself. I raised my head in

triumph upon the players. After I had returned the money I had taken from it to my father's purse, I left my winnings with that honest and worthy gentleman, who continued to win. As soon as I found myself possessed of a hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them up in my handkerchief, so that they could neither move nor rattle on the way back ; and I played no more.

“What were you doing at the card-table?” said my father as we stepped into the carriage.

“I was looking on,” I answered, trembling.

“But it would have been nothing out of the common if you had been prompted by self-love to put some money down on the table. In the eyes of men of the world you are quite old enough to assume the right to commit such follies. So I should have pardoned you, Raphael, if you had made use of my purse. . . .”

‘I did not answer. When we reached home, I returned the keys and money to my father. As he entered his study, he emptied out his purse on the mantelpiece, counted the money, and turned to me with a kindly look, saying, with more or less long and significant pauses between each phrase—

“My boy, you are very nearly twenty now. I am satisfied with you. You ought to have an allowance, if only to teach you how to lay it out, and to gain some acquaintance with everyday business. Henceforward I shall let you have a hundred francs each month. Here is your first quarter's income for this year,” he added, fingering a pile of gold, as if to make sure that the amount was correct. ‘Do what you please with it.’

‘I confess that I was ready to fling myself at his feet, to tell him that I was a thief, a scoundrel, and, worse than all, a liar! But a feeling of shame held me back. I went up to him for an embrace, but he gently pushed me away.

“You are a man now, *my child*,” he said. “What I have just done was a very proper and simple thing, for which there is no need to thank me. If I have any

claim to your gratitude, Raphael," he went on, in a kind but dignified way, "it is because I have preserved your youth from the evils that destroy young men in Paris. We will be two friends henceforth. In a year's time you will be a doctor of law. Not without some hardship and privation you have acquired the sound knowledge and the love of, and application to, work that is indispensable to public men. You must learn to know me, Raphael. I do not want to make either an advocate or a notary of you, but a statesman, who shall be the pride of our poor house. . . . Good-night," he added.

'From that day my father took me fully into confidence. I was an only son; and, ten years before, I had lost my mother. In time past my father, the head of a historic family remembered even now in Auvergne, had come to Paris to fight against his evil star, dissatisfied at the prospect of tilling the soil, with his useless sword by his side. He was endowed with the shrewdness that gives the men of the south of France a certain ascendancy when energy goes with it. Almost unaided, he made a position for himself near the fountain of power. The Revolution brought a reverse of fortune, but he had managed to marry an heiress of good family, and, in the time of the Empire, appeared to be on the point of restoring to our house its ancient splendour.

'The Restoration, while it brought back considerable property to my mother, was my father's ruin. He had formerly purchased several estates abroad, conferred by the Emperor on his generals; and now for ten years he struggled with liquidators, diplomatists, and Prussian and Bavarian courts of law, over the disputed possession of these unfortunate endowments. My father plunged me into the intricate labyrinths of law proceedings on which our future depended. We might be compelled to return the rents, as well as the proceeds arising from sales of timber made during the years 1814 to 1817; in that case my mother's property would have barely saved our credit. So it fell out that the day on which my father

in a fashion emancipated me, brought me under a most galling yoke. I entered on a conflict like a battlefield; I must work day and night; seek interviews with statesmen, surprise their convictions, try to interest them in our affairs, and gain them over, with their wives and servants, and their very dogs; and all this abominable business had to take the form of pretty speeches and polite attentions. Then I knew the mortifications that had left their blighting traces on my father's face. For about a year I led outwardly the life of a man of the world, but enormous labours lay beneath the surface of gadding about, and eager efforts to attach myself to influential kinsmen, or to people likely to be useful to us. My relaxations were lawsuits, and memorials still furnished the staple of my conversation. Hitherto my life had been blameless, from the sheer impossibility of indulging the desires of youth; but now I became my own master, and in dread of involving us both in ruin by some piece of negligence, I did not dare to allow myself any pleasure or expenditure.

'While we are young, and before the world has rubbed off the delicate bloom from our sentiments, the freshness of our impressions, the noble purity of conscience which will never allow us to palter with evil, the sense of duty is very strong within us, the voice of honour clamours within us, and we are open and straightforward. At that time I was all these things. I wished to justify my father's confidence in me. But lately I would have stolen a paltry sum from him, with secret delight; but now that I shared the burden of his affairs, of his name and of his house, I would secretly have given up my fortune and my hopes for him, as I was sacrificing my pleasures, and even have been glad of the sacrifice! So when Mde. Villèle exhorted, for our special benefit, an imperial decree concerning forfeitures, and had ruined us, I authorised the sale of my property, only retaining an island in the middle of the Loire where my mother

was buried. Perhaps arguments and evasions, philosophical, philanthropic, and political considerations would not fail me now, to hinder the perpetration of what my solicitor termed a "folly;" but at one-and-twenty, I repeat, we are all aglow with generosity and affection. The tears that stood in my father's eyes were to me the most splendid of fortunes, and the thought of those tears has often soothed my sorrow. Ten months after he had paid his creditors, my father died of grief; I was his idol, and he had ruined me! The thought killed him. Towards the end of the autumn of 1826, at the age of twenty-two, I was the sole mourner at his graveside—the grave of my father and my earliest friend. Not many young men have found themselves alone with their thoughts as they followed a hearse, or have seen themselves lost in crowded Paris, and without money or prospects. Orphans rescued by public charity have at any rate the future of the battlefield before them, and find a shelter in some institution and a father in the government or in the *procureur du roi*. I had nothing.

‘Three months later, an agent made over to me eleven hundred and twelve francs, the net proceeds of the winding up of my father's affairs. Our creditors had driven us to sell our furniture. From my childhood I had been used to set a high value on the articles of luxury about us, and I could not help showing my astonishment at the sight of this meagre balance.

“Oh, rococo, all of it!” said the auctioneer. A terrible word that fell like a blight on the sacred memories of my childhood, and dispelled my earliest illusions, the dearest of all. My entire fortune was comprised in this “account rendered,” my future lay in a linen bag with eleven hundred and twelve francs in it, human society stood before me in the person of an auctioneer's clerk, who kept his hat on while he spoke. Jonathas, an old servant who was much attached to me, and whom my mother had formerly pensioned with an annuity of

four hundred francs, spoke to me as I was leaving the house that I had so often gaily left for a drive in my childhood.

“Be very economical, Monsieur Raphael!”

‘The good fellow was crying.

‘Such were the events, dear Emile, that ruled my destinies, moulded my character, and set me, while still young, in an utterly false social position,’ said Raphael after a pause. ‘Family ties, weak ones, it is true, bound me to a few wealthy houses, but my own pride would have kept me aloof from them if contempt and indifference had not shut their doors on me in the first place. I was related to people who were very influential, and who lavished their patronage on strangers; but I found neither relations nor patrons in them. Continually circumscribed in my affections, they recoiled upon me. Unreserved and simple by nature, I must have appeared frigid and sophisticated. My father’s discipline had destroyed all confidence in myself. I was shy and awkward; I could not believe that my opinion carried any weight whatever; I took no pleasure in myself; I thought myself ugly, and was ashamed to meet my own eyes. In spite of the inward voice that must be the stay of a man with anything in him, in all his struggles, the voice that cries, “Courage! Go forward!” in spite of sudden revelations of my own strength in my solitude; in spite of the hopes that thrilled me as I compared new works, that the public admired so much, with the schemes that hovered in my brain,—in spite of all this, I had a childish mistrust of myself.

‘An overweening ambition preyed upon me; I believed that I was meant for great things, and yet I felt myself to be nothing. I had need of other men, and I was friendless. I found I must make my way in the world, where I was quite alone, and bashful, rather than afraid.

‘All through the year in which, by my father’s wish, I threw myself into the whirlpool of fashionable society,

I came away with an inexperienced heart, and fresh in mind. Like every grown child, I sighed in secret for a love affair. I met, among young men of my own age, a set of swaggerers who held their heads high, and talked about trifles as they seated themselves without a tremor beside women who inspired awe in me. They chattered nonsense, sucked the heads of their canes, gave themselves affected airs, appropriated the fairest women, and laid, or pretended that they had laid their heads on every pillow. Pleasure, seemingly, was at their beck and call; they looked on the most virtuous and prudish as an easy prey, ready to surrender at a word, at the slightest impudent gesture or insolent look. I declare, on my soul and conscience, that the attainment of power, or of a great name in literature, seemed to me an easier victory than a success with some young, witty, and gracious lady of high degree.

So I found the tumult of my heart, my feelings, and my creeds all at variance with the axioms of society. I had plenty of audacity in my character, but none in my manner. Later, I found out that women did not like to be implored. I have from afar adored many a one to whom I devoted a soul proof against all tests, a heart to break, energy that shrank from no sacrifice and from no torture; *they* accepted fools whom I would not have engaged as hall porters. How often, mute and motionless, have I not admired the lady of my dreams, swaying in the dance; given up my life in thought to one eternal caress, expressed all my hopes in a look, and laid before her, in my rapture, a young man's love, which should outstrip all fables. At some moments I was ready to barter my whole life for one single night. Well, as I could never find a listener for my impassioned proposals, eyes to rest my own upon, a heart made for my heart, I lived on in all the sufferings of impotent force that consumes itself; lacking either opportunity or courage or experience. I despaired, maybe, of making myself under-

stood, or I feared to be understood but too well; and yet the storm within me was ready to burst at every chance courteous look. In spite of my readiness to take the semblance of interest in look or word for a tenderer solicitude, I dared neither to speak nor to be silent seasonably. My words grew insignificant, and my silence stupid, by sheer stress of emotion. I was too ingenuous, no doubt, for that artificial life, led by candle-light, where every thought is expressed in conventional phrases, or by words that fashion dictates; and not only so, I had not learned how to employ speech that says nothing, and silence that says a great deal. In short, I concealed the fires that consumed me, and with such a soul as women wish to find, with all the elevation of soul that they long for, and a mettle that fools plume themselves upon, all women have been cruelly treacherous to me.

‘So in my simplicity I admired the heroes of this set when they bragged about their conquests, and never suspected them of lying. No doubt it was a mistake to wish for a love that springs for a word’s sake; to expect to find in the heart of a vain, frivolous woman, greedy for luxury and intoxicated with vanity, the great sea of passion that surged tempestuously in my own breast. Oh! to feel that you were born to love, to make some woman’s happiness, and yet to find not one, not even a noble and courageous Marceline, not so much as an old Marquise! Oh! to carry a treasure in your wallet, and not find even some child, or inquisitive young girl, to admire it! In my despair I often wished to kill myself.

‘“Finely tragical to-night!” cried Emile.

‘Let me pass sentence on my life,’ Raphael answered. ‘If your friendship is not strong enough to bear with my elegy, if you cannot put up with half an hour’s tedium for my sake, go to sleep! But, then, never ask again for the reason of the suicide that hangs over me, that comes nearer and calls to me, that I bow myself before. If you are to judge a man, you must know his secret thoughts,

sorrows, and feelings; to know merely the outward events of a man's life would only serve to make a chronological table—a fool's notion of history.'

Emile was so much struck with the bitter tones in which these words were spoken, that he began to pay close attention to Raphael, whom he watched with a bewildered expression.

'Now,' continued the speaker, 'all these things that befell me appear in a new light. The sequence of events that I once thought so unfortunate created the splendid powers of which, later, I became so proud. If I may believe you, I possess the power of readily expressing my thoughts, and I could take a forward place in the great field of knowledge; and is not this the result of scientific curiosity, of excessive application, and a love of reading which possessed me from the age of seven till my entry on life? The very neglect in which I was left, and the consequent habits of self-repression and self-concentration; did not these things teach me how to consider and reflect? Nothing in me was squandered in obedience to the exactions of the world, which humble the proudest soul and reduce it to a mere husk; and was it not this very fact that refined the emotional part of my nature till it became the perfected instrument of a loftier purpose than passionate desires? I remember watching the women who mistook me with all the insight of contemned love.

'I can see now that my natural sincerity must have been displeasing to them; women, perhaps, even require a little hypocrisy. And I, who in the same hour's space am alternately a man and a child, frivolous and thoughtful, free from bias and brimful of superstition, and oftentimes myself as much a woman as any of them; how should they do otherwise than take my simplicity for cynicism, my innocent candour for impudence? They found my knowledge tiresome; my feminine languor, weakness. I was held to be listless and incapable of love

or of steady purpose; a too active imagination, that curse of poets, was no doubt the cause. My silence was idiotic; and as I daresay I alarmed them by my efforts to please, women one and all have condemned me. With tears and mortification, I bowed before the decision of the world; but my distress was not barren. I determined to revenge myself on society; I would dominate the feminine intellect, and so have the feminine soul at my mercy; all eyes should be fixed upon me, when the servant at the door announced my name. I had determined from my childhood that I would be a great man; I said with André Chenier, as I struck my forehead, "There is something underneath that!" I felt, I believed, the thought within me that I must express, the system I must establish, the knowledge I must interpret.

"Let me pour out my follies, dear Emile; to-day I am barely twenty-six years old, certain of dying unrecognised, and I have never been the lover of the woman I dreamed of possessing. Have we not all of us, more or less, believed in the reality of a thing because we wished it? I would never have a young man for my friend who did not place himself in dreams upon a pedestal, weave crowns for his head, and have complaisant mistresses. I myself would often be a general, nay, emperor; I have been a Byron, and then a nobody. After this sport on these pinnacles of human achievement, I became aware that all the difficulties and steepes of life were yet to face. My exuberant self-esteem came to my aid; I had that intense belief in my destiny, which perhaps amounts to genius in those who will not permit themselves to be distracted by contact with the world, as sheep that leave their wool on the briars of every thicket they pass by. I meant to cover myself with glory, and to work in silence for the mistress I hoped to have one day. Women for me were resumed into a single type, and this woman I looked to meet in the first that met my eyes; but in each and all I saw a queen, and as queens must make the first advances to

their lovers, they must draw near to me—to me, so sickly, shy, and poor. For her, who should take pity on me, my heart held in store such gratitude over and beyond love, that I had worshipped her her whole life long. Later, my observations have taught me bitter truths.

‘In this way, dear Emile, I ran the risk of remaining companionless for good. The incomprehensible bent of women’s minds appears to lead them to see nothing but the weak points in a clever man, and the strong points of a fool. They feel the liveliest sympathy with the fool’s good qualities, which perpetually flatter their own defects; while they find the man of talent hardly agreeable enough to compensate for his shortcomings. All capacity is a sort of intermittent fever, and no woman is anxious to share in its discomforts only; they look to find in their lovers the wherewithal to gratify their own vanity. It is themselves that they love in us! But the artist, poor and proud, along with his endowment of creative power, is furnished with an aggressive egotism! Everything about him is involved in I know not what whirlpool of his ideas, and even his mistress must gyrate along with them. How is a woman, spoilt with praise, to believe in the love of a man like that? Will she go to seek him out? That sort of lover has not the leisure to sit beside a sofa and give himself up to the sentimental simperings that women are so fond of, and on which the false and unfeeling pride themselves. He cannot spare the time from his work, and how can he afford to humble himself and go a masquerading! I was ready to give my life once and for all, but I could not degrade it in detail. Besides, there is something indescribably paltry in a stockbroker’s tactics, who runs on errands for some insipid affected woman; all this disgusts an artist. Love in the abstract is not enough for a great man in poverty; he has need of its utmost devotion. The frivolous creatures who spend their lives in trying on cashmeres, or make themselves into clothes-pegs to hang the fashions from, exact the

devotion which is not theirs to give; for them, love means the pleasure of ruling and not of obeying. She who is really a wife, one in heart, flesh, and bone, must follow wherever he leads, in whom her life, her strength, her pride, and happiness are centred. Ambitious men need those Oriental women whose whole thought is given to the study of their requirements; for unhappiness means for them the incompatibility of their means with their desires. But I, who took myself for a man of genius, must needs feel attracted by these very she-coxcombs. So, as I cherished ideas so different from those generally received; as I wished to scale the heavens without a ladder, was possessed of wealth that could not circulate, and of knowledge so wide and so imperfectly arranged and digested that it overtaxed my memory; as I had neither relations nor friends in the midst of this lonely and ghastly desert, a desert of paving stones, full of animation, life, and thought, wherein every one is worse than inimical, indifferent to wit; I made a very natural, if foolish resolve, which required such unknown impossibilities, that my spirits rose. It was as if I had laid a wager with myself, for I was at once the player and the cards.

'This was my plan. The eleven hundred francs must keep life in me for three years—the time I allowed myself in which to bring to light a work which should draw attention to me, and make me either a name or a fortune. I exulted at the thought of living on bread and milk, like a hermit in the Thebaid, while I plunged into the world of books and ideas, and so reached a lofty sphere beyond the tumult of Paris, a sphere of silent labour where I would entomb myself like a chrysalis to await a brilliant and splendid new birth. I imperilled my life in order to live. By reducing my requirements to real needs and the barest necessities, I found that three hundred and sixty-five francs sufficed for a year of penury; and, in fact, I managed to exist on that slender sum, so long as I submitted to my own claustral discipline.'

‘Impossible!’ cried Emile.

‘I lived for nearly three years in that way,’ Raphaël answered, with a kind of pride. ‘Let us reckon it out. Three *sous* for bread, two for milk, and three for cold meat, kept me from dying of hunger, and my mind in a state of peculiar lucidity. I have observed, as you know, the wonderful effects produced by diet upon the imagination. My lodgings cost me three *sous* daily; I burnt three *sous* more in oil at night; I did my own housework, and wore flannel shirts so as to reduce the laundress’s bill to two *sous* per day. The money I spent yearly in coal, if divided up, never cost more than two *sous* for each day. I had three years’ supply of clothing, and I only dressed when going out to some library or public lecture. These expenses, all told, only amounted to eighteen *sous*, so two were left over for emergencies. I cannot recollect, during that long period of toil, either crossing the Pont des Arts, or paying for water; I went out to fetch it every morning from the fountain in the Place Saint Michel, at the corner of the Rue de Grès. Oh, I wore my poverty proudly. A man urged on towards a fair future walks through life like an innocent person to his death; he feels no shame about it.

‘I would not think of illness. Like Aquilina, I faced the hospital without terror. I had not a moment’s doubt of my health, and besides, the poor can only take to their beds to die. I cut my own hair till the day when an angel of love and kindness . . . But I do not want to anticipate the state of things that I shall reach later. You must simply know that I lived with one grand thought for a mistress, a dream, an illusion which deceives us all more or less at first. To-day I laugh at myself, at that self, holy perhaps and heroic, which is now no more. I have since had a closer view of society and the world, of our manners and customs, and seen the dangers of my innocent credulity and the superfluous nature of my fervent toil. Stores of that sort are quite useless to

aspirants for fame. Light should be the baggage of seekers after fortune!

‘Ambitious men spend their youth in rendering themselves worthy of patronage; it is their great mistake. While the foolish creatures are laying in stores of knowledge and energy, so that they shall not sink under the weight of responsible posts that recede from them, schemers come and go who are wealthy in words and destitute of ideas, astonish the ignorant, and creep into the confidence of those who have a little knowledge. While the first kind study, the second march ahead; the one sort is modest, and the other impudent; the man of genius is silent about his own merit, but these schemers make a flourish of theirs, and they are bound to get on. It is so strongly to the interest of men in office to believe in ready-made capacity, and in brazen-faced merit, that it is downright childish of the learned to expect material rewards. I do not seek to paraphrase the commonplace moral, the song of songs that obscure genius is for ever singing; I want to come, in a logical manner, by the reason of the frequent successes of mediocrity. Alas! study shows us such a mother's kindness that it would be a sin perhaps to ask any other reward of her than the pure and delightful pleasures with which she sustains her children.

‘Often I remember soaking my bread in milk, as I sat by the window to take the fresh air; while my eyes wandered over a view of roofs—brown, grey, or red, slated or tiled, and covered with yellow or green mosses. At first the prospect may have seemed monotonous, but I very soon found peculiar beauties in it. Sometimes at night, streams of light through half-closed shutters would light up and colour the dark abysses of this strange landscape. Sometimes the feeble lights of the street lamps sent up yellow gleams through the fog, and in each street dimly outlined the undulations of a crowd of roofs, like billows in a motionless sea. Very occasionally, too, a

face appeared in this gloomy waste ; above the flowers in some skyey garden I caught a glimpse of an old woman's crooked angular profile as she watered her nasturtiums ; or, in a crazy attic window, a young girl, fancying herself quite alone as she dressed herself—a view of nothing more than a fair forehead and long tresses held above her by a pretty white arm.

‘I liked to see the short-lived plant-life in the gutters—poor weeds that a storm soon washed away. I studied the mosses, with their colours revived by showers, or transformed by the sun into a brown velvet that fitfully caught the light. Such things as these formed my recreations—the passing poetic moods of daylight, the melancholy mists, sudden gleams of sunlight, the silence and the magic of night, the mysteries of dawn, the smoke wreaths from each chimney ; every chance event, in fact, in my curious world became familiar to me. I came to love this prison of my own choosing. This level Parisian prairie of roofs, beneath which lay populous abysses, suited my humour, and harmonised with my thoughts.

‘Sudden descents into the world from the divine height of scientific meditation are very exhausting ; and, besides, I had apprehended perfectly the bare life of the cloister. When I made up my mind to carry out this new plan of life, I looked for quarters in the most out-of-the-way parts of Paris. One evening, as I returned home to the Rue des Cordiers from the Place de l'Estrapade, I saw a girl of fourteen playing with a battledore at the corner of the Rue de Cluny ; her winsome ways and laughter amused the neighbours. September was not yet over ; it was warm and fine, so that women sat chatting before their doors as if it were a fête-day in some country town. At first I watched the charming expression of the girl's face and her graceful attitudes, her pose fit for a painter. It was a pretty sight. I looked about me, seeking to understand this blithe simplicity in the midst of Paris,

and saw that the street was a blind alley and but little frequented. I remembered that Jean Jacques had once lived here, and looked up the Hôtel Saint-Quentin. Its dilapidated condition awakened hopes of a cheap lodging, and I determined to enter.

‘I found myself in a room with a low ceiling; the candles, in classic-looking copper candlesticks, were set in a row under each key. The predominating cleanliness of the room made a striking contrast to the usual state of such places. This one was as neat as a bit of *genre*; there was a charming trimness about the blue coverlet, the cooking pots and furniture. The mistress of the house rose and came to me. She seemed to be about forty years of age; sorrows had left their traces on her features, and weeping had dimmed her eyes. I deferentially mentioned the amount I could pay; it seemed to cause her no surprise; she sought out a key from the row, went up to the attics with me, and showed me a room that looked out on the neighbouring roofs and courts; long poles with linen drying on them hung out of the window.

‘Nothing could be uglier than this garret, awaiting its scholar, with its dingy yellow walls and odour of poverty. The roofing fell in a steep slope, and the sky was visible through chinks in the tiles. There was room for a bed, a table, and a few chairs, and beneath the highest point of the roof my piano could stand. Not being rich enough to furnish this cage (that might have been one of the *Piombi* of Venice), the poor woman had never been able to let it; and as I had saved from the recent sale, the furniture that was in a fashion peculiarly mine, I very soon came to terms with my landlady, and moved in on the following day.

‘For three years I lived in this airy sepulchre, and worked unflaggingly day and night; and so great was the pleasure, that study seemed to me the fairest theme and the happiest solution of life. The tranquillity and

peace that a scholar needs is something as sweet and exhilarating as love. Unspeakable joys are showered on us by the exertion of our mental faculties; the quest of ideas, and the tranquil contemplation of knowledge; delights indescribable, because purely intellectual and impalpable to our senses. So we are obliged to use material terms to express the mysteries of the soul. The pleasure of striking out in some lonely lake of clear water, with forests, rocks, and flowers around, and the soft stirring of the warm breeze,—all this would give to those who knew them not, a very faint idea of the exultation with which my soul bathed itself in the beams of an unknown light, hearkened to the awful and uncertain voice of inspiration, as vision upon vision poured from some unknown source through my throbbing brain.

‘No earthly pleasure can compare with the divine delight of watching the dawn of an idea in the space of abstractions, as it rises like the morning sun; an idea that, better still, attains gradually like a child to puberty and man’s estate. Study lends a kind of enchantment to all our surroundings. The wretched desk covered with brown leather at which I wrote, my piano, bed, and arm-chair, the odd wall-paper and furniture, seemed to have for me a kind of life in them, and to be humble friends of mine and mute partakers of my destiny. How often have I confided my soul to them in a glance! A warped bit of beading often met my eyes, and suggested new developments,—a striking proof of my system, or a felicitous word by which to render my all but inexpressible thought. By sheer contemplation of the things about me I discerned an expression and a character in each. If the setting sun happened to steal in through my narrow window, they would take new colours, fade or shine, grow dull or gay, and always amaze me with some new effect. These trifling incidents of a solitary life, which escape those pre-occupied with outward affairs, make the solace of prisoners. And what was I

but the captive of an idea, imprisoned in my system, but sustained also by the prospect of a brilliant future? At each obstacle that I overcame, I seemed to kiss the soft hands of a woman with a fair face, a wealthy, well-dressed woman, who should some day say softly, while she caressed my hair—

“Poor angel, how thou hast suffered!”

‘I had undertaken two great works—one a comedy that in a very short time must bring me wealth and fame, and an entry into those circles whither I wished to return, to exercise the royal privileges of a man of genius. You all saw nothing in that masterpiece but the blunder of a young man fresh from college, a babyish fiasco. Your jokes clipped the wings of a throng of illusions, which have never stirred since within me. You, dear Emile, alone brought soothing to the deep wounds that others had made in my heart. You alone will admire my “Theory of the Will.” I devoted most of my time to that long work, for which I studied Oriental languages, physiology and anatomy. If I do not deceive myself, my labours will complete the task begun by Mesmer, Lavater, Gale, and Bichat, and open up new paths in science.

‘There ends that fair life of mine, the daily sacrifice, the unrecognised silkworm’s toil, that is, perhaps, its own sole recompense. Since attaining years of discretion, until the day when I finished my “Theory,” I observed, learned, wrote, and read unintermittingly; my life was one long imposition, as schoolboys say. Though by nature effeminately attached to Oriental indolence, sensual in tastes, and a wooer of dreams, I worked incessantly, and refused to taste any of the enjoyments of Parisian life. Though a glutton, I became abstemious; and loving exercise and sea voyages as I did, and haunted by the wish to visit many countries, still child enough to play at ducks and drakes with pebbles over a pond, I led a sedentary life with a pen in my fingers. I liked talking,

but I went to sit and mutely listen to professors who gave public lectures at the *Bibliothèque* or the Museum. I slept upon my solitary pallet like a Benedictine brother, though woman was my one chimera, a chimera that fled from me as I wooed it! In short, my life has been a cruel contradiction, a perpetual cheat. After that, judge a man!

‘Sometimes my natural propensities broke out like a fire long smothered. I was debarred from the women whose society I desired, stripped of everything and lodged in an artist’s garret, and by a sort of mirage or caleure I was surrounded by captivating mistresses. I drove through the streets of Paris, lolling on the soft cushions of a fine equipage. I plunged into dissipation, into corroding vice, I desired and possessed everything, for fasting had made me light-headed like the tempted Saint Anthony. Slumber, happily, would put an end at last to these devastating trances; and on the morrow science would beckon me, smiling, and I was faithful to her. I imagine that women reputed virtuous, must often fall a prey to these insane tempests of desire and passion, which rise in us in spite of ourselves. Such dreams have a charm of their own; they are something akin to evening gossip round the winter fire, when one sets out for some voyage in China. But what becomes of virtue during these delicious excursions, when fancy overleaps all difficulties?

‘During the first ten months of seclusion I led the life of poverty and solitude that I have described to you; I used to steal out unobserved every morning to buy my own provisions for the day; I tidied my room; I was at once master and servant, and played the Diogenes with incredible spirit. But afterwards, while my hostess and her daughter watched my ways and behaviour, scrutinised my appearance and divined my poverty, there could not but be some bonds between us; perhaps because they were themselves so very poor. Pauline, the charming child, whose latent and unconscious grace had, in a

manner, brought me there, did me many services that I could not well refuse. All women fallen on evil days are sisters; they speak a common language; they have the same generosity—the generosity that possesses nothing, and so is lavish of its affection, of its time, and of its very self.

‘Imperceptibly Pauline took me under her protection, and would do things for me. No kind of objection was made by her mother, whom I even surprised mending my linen; she blushed for the charitable occupation. In spite of myself, they took charge of me, and I accepted their services.

‘In order to understand the peculiar condition of my mind, my preoccupation with work must be remembered, the tyranny of ideas, and the instinctive repugnance that a man who leads an intellectual life must ever feel for the material details of existence. Could I well repulse the delicate attentions of Pauline, who would noiselessly bring me my frugal repast, when she noticed that I had taken nothing for seven or eight hours? She had the tact of a woman and the inventiveness of a child; she would smile as she made sign to me that I must not see her. Ariel glided under my roof in the form of a sylph who foresaw every want of mine.

‘One evening Pauline told me her story with touching simplicity. Her father had been a major in the horse grenadiers of the Imperial guard. He had been taken prisoner by the Cossacks, at the passage of the Beresina; and when Napoleon later on proposed an exchange, the Russian authorities made search for him in Siberia in vain; he had escaped with a view of reaching India, and since then Mme. Gaudin, my landlady, could hear no news of her husband. Then came the disasters of 1814 and 1815; and, left alone and without resource, she had decided to let furnished lodgings in order to keep herself and her daughter.

‘She always hoped to see her husband again. Her

greatest trouble was about her daughter's education ; the princess Borghese was her Pauline's godmother ; and Pauline must not be unworthy of the fair future promised by her imperial protectress. When Mme. Gaudin confided to me this heavy trouble that preyed upon her, she said, with sharp pain in her voice, "I would give up the property and the scrap of paper that makes Gaudin a baron of the empire, and all our rights to the endowment of Wistchnau, if only Pauline could be brought up at Saint-Denis !" Her words struck me ; now I could show my gratitude for the kindnesses expended on me by the two women ; all at once the idea of offering to finish Pauline's education occurred to me ; and the offer was made and accepted in the most perfect simplicity. In this way I came to have some hours of recreation. Pauline had natural aptitude ; she learned so quickly, that she soon surpassed me at the piano. As she became accustomed to think aloud in my presence, she unfolded all the sweet refinements of a heart that was opening itself out to life, as some flower-cup opens slowly to the sun. She listened to me, pleased and thoughtful, letting her dark velvet eyes rest upon me with a half smile in them ; she repeated her lessons in soft and gentle tones, and showed childish glee when I was satisfied with her. Her mother grew more and more anxious every day to shield the young girl from every danger (for all the beauty promised in early life was developing in the crescent moon), and was glad to see her spend whole days indoors in study. My piano was the only one she could use, and while I was out she practised on it. When I came home, Pauline would be in my room, in her shabby dress, but her slightest movement revealed her slender figure in its attractive grace, in spite of the coarse materials that she wore. As with the heroine of the fable of "*Peau-d'Ane*," a dainty foot peeped out of the clumsy shoes. But all her wealth of girlish beauty was as lost upon me. I had laid commands upon myself to see a sister only in Pauline. I

dreaded lest I should betray her mother's faith in me. I admired the lovely girl as if she had been a picture, or as the portrait of a dead mistress; she was at once my child and my statue. For me, another Pygmalion, the maiden with the hues of life and the living voice was to become a form of inanimate marble. I was very strict with her, but the more I made her feel my pedagogue's severity, the more gentle and submissive she grew.

'If a generous feeling strengthened me in my reserve and self-restraint, prudent considerations were not lacking beside. Integrity of purpose cannot, I think, fail to accompany integrity in money matters. To my mind, to become insolvent or to betray a woman is the same sort of thing. If you love a young girl, or allow yourself to be beloved by her, a contract is implied, and its conditions should be thoroughly understood. We are free to break with the woman who sells herself, but not with the young girl who has given herself to us and does not know the extent of her sacrifice. I must have married Pauline, and that would have been madness. Would it not have given over that sweet girlish heart to terrible misfortunes? My poverty made its selfish voice heard, and set an iron barrier between that gentle nature and mine. Besides, I am ashamed to say, that I cannot imagine love in the midst of poverty. Perhaps this is a vitiation due to that malady of mankind called civilisation; but a woman in squalid poverty would exert no fascination over me, were she attractive as Homer's Galatea, the fair Helen.

'Ah, *vive l'amour!* But let it be in silk and cashmere, surrounded with the luxury which so marvellously embellishes it; for is it not perhaps itself a luxury? I enjoy making havoc with an elaborate erection of scented hair; I like to crush flowers, to disarrange and crease a smart toilette at will. A bizarre attraction lies for me in burning eyes that blaze through a lace veil, like flame through cannon smoke. My way of love would be to mount by a silken ladder, in the silence of a winter night. And

what bliss to reach, all powdered with snow, a perfumed room, with hangings of painted silk, to find a woman there, who likewise shakes away the snow from her; for what other name can be found for the white muslin wrappings that vaguely define her, like some angel form issuing from a cloud! And then I wish for furtive joys, for the security of audacity. I want to see once more that woman of mystery, but let it be in the throng, dazzling, unapproachable, adored on all sides, dressed in laces and ablaze with diamonds, laying her commands upon every one; so exalted above us, that she inspires awe, and none dares to pay his homage to her.

‘She gives me a stolen glance, amid her court, a look that exposes the unreality of all this; that resigns for me the world and all men in it! Truly I have scorned myself for a passion for a few yards of lace, velvet, and fine lawn, and the hairdresser’s feats of skill; a love of wax-lights, a carriage and a title, a heraldic coronet painted on window panes, or engraved by a jeweller; in short, a liking for all that is adventitious and least woman in woman. I have scorned and reasoned with myself, but all in vain.

‘A woman of rank with her subtle smile, her high-born air, and self-esteem captivates me. The barriers she erects between herself and the world waken my vanity, a good half of love. There would be more relish for me in bliss that all others envied. If my mistress does nothing that other women do, and neither lives nor conducts herself like them, wears a cloak that they cannot attain, breathes a perfume of her own, then she seems to rise far above me. The further she rises from earth, even in the earthlier aspects of love, the fairer she becomes for me.

‘Luckily for me we have had no queen in France these twenty years, for I should have fallen in love with her. A woman must be wealthy to acquire the manners of a princess. What place had Pauline among these far-fetched

imaginings? Could she bring me the love that is death, that brings every faculty into play, the nights that are paid for by life? We hardly die, I think, for an insignificant girl who gives herself to us; and I could never extinguish these feelings and poet's dreams within me. I was born for an inaccessible love, and fortune has overtopped my desire.

'How often have I set satin shoes on Pauline's tiny feet, confined her form, slender as a young poplar, in a robe of gauze, and thrown a loose scarf about her as I saw her tread the carpets in her mansion and led her out to her splendid carriage! In such guise I should have adored her. I endowed her with all the pride she lacked, stripped her of her virtues, her natural simple charm, and frank smile, in order to plunge her heart in our Styx of depravity that makes invulnerable, load her with our crimes, make of her the fantastical doll of our drawing-rooms, the frail being who lies a-bed in the morning and comes to life again at night with the dawn of tapers. Pauline was fresh-hearted and affectionate—I would have had her cold and formal.

'In the last days of my frantic folly, memory brought Pauline before me, as it brings the scenes of our childhood, and made me pause to muse over past delicious moments that softened my heart. I sometimes saw her, the adorable girl who sat quietly sewing at my table, wrapped in her meditations; the faint light from my window fell upon her and was reflected back in silvery rays from her thick black hair; sometimes I heard her young laughter, or the rich tones of her voice singing some canzonet that she composed without effort. And often my Pauline seemed to grow greater, as music flowed from her, and her face bore a striking resemblance to the noble one that Carlo Dolci chose for the type of Italy. My cruel memory brought her back athwart the dissipations of my existence, like a remorse, or a symbol of purity. But let us leave the poor child to her own fate. Whatever her

troubles may have been, at any rate I protected her from a menacing tempest—I did not drag her down into my hell.

‘Until last winter I led the uneventful studious life of which I have given you some faint picture. In the earliest days of December 1829, I came across Rastignac, who, in spite of the shabby condition of my wardrobe, linked his arm in mine, and inquired into my affairs with a quite brotherly interest. Caught by his engaging manner, I gave him a brief account of my life and hopes; he began to laugh, and treated me as a mixture, of a man of genius and a fool. His Gascon accent and knowledge of the world, the easy life his clever management procured for him, all produced an irresistible effect upon me. I should die an unrecognised failure in a hospital, Rastignac said, and be buried in a pauper’s grave. He talked of charlatanism. Every man of genius was a charlatan, he plainly showed me in that pleasant way of his that makes him so fascinating. He insisted that I must be out of my senses, and would be my own death, if I lived on alone in the Rue des Cordiers. According to him, I ought to go into society, to accustom people to the sound of my name, and to rid myself of the simple title of “Monsieur” which sits but ill on a great man in his lifetime.

“Those who know no better,” he cried, “call this sort of business *scheming*, and moral people condemn it for a ‘dissipated life.’ We need not stop to look at what people think, but see the results. You work, you say? Very good, but nothing will ever come of that. Now, I am ready for anything and fit for nothing. As lazy as a lobster? Very likely, but I succeed everywhere. I go out into society, I push myself forward, the others make way before me; I brag and am believed; I incur debts which somebody else pays! Dissipation, dear boy, is a methodical policy. The life of a man who deliberately runs through his fortune often becomes a business specu-

lation ; his friends, his pleasures, patrons, and acquaintances are his capital. Suppose a merchant runs a risk of a million, for twenty years he can neither sleep, eat, nor amuse himself ; he is brooding over his million ; it makes him run about all over Europe ; he worries himself, goes to the devil in every way that man has invented. Then comes a liquidation, such as I have seen myself, which very often leaves him penniless and without a reputation or a friend. The spendthrift, on the other hand, takes life as a serious game, and sees his horses run. He loses his capital, perhaps, but he stands a chance of being nominated Receiver-General, of making a wealthy marriage, or of an appointment as attaché to a minister or ambassador ; and he has his friends left and his name, and he never wants money. He knows the standing of everybody, and uses every one for his own benefit. Is this logical, or am I a madman after all ? Haven't you there all the moral of the comedy that goes on every day in this world ? . . . Your work is completed," he went on after a pause ; "you are immensely clever ! Well, you have only arrived at my starting-point. Now, you had better look after its success yourself ; it is the surest way. You will make allies in every clique, and secure applause beforehand. I mean to go halves in your glory myself ; I shall be the jeweller who set the diamonds in your crown. Come here to-morrow evening, by way of a beginning. I will introduce you to a house where all Paris goes, all *our* Paris, that is—the Paris of exquisites, millionaires, celebrities, all the folk who talk gold like Chrysostom. When they have taken up a book, that book becomes the fashion ; and if it is something really good for once, they will have declared it to be a work of genius without knowing it. If you have any sense, my dear fellow, you will ensure the success of your 'Theory,' by a better understanding of the theory of success. To-morrow evening you shall go to see that queen of the moment—the beautiful Countess Fœdora. . . "

“I have never heard of her. . . .”

“You Hottentot!” laughed Rastignac; “you do not know Fœdora? A great match with an income of nearly eighty thousand livres, who has taken a fancy to nobody, or else no one has taken a fancy to her. A sort of feminine enigma, a half Russian Parisienne, or a half Parisian Russian. All the romantic productions that never get published are brought out at her house; she is the handsomest woman in Paris, and the most gracious! You are not even a Hottentot; you are something between the Hottentot and the beast. . . . Good-bye till to-morrow.”

‘He swung round on his heel and made off without waiting for my answer. It never occurred to him that a reasoning being could refuse an introduction to Fœdora. How can the fascination of a name be explained? FœDORA haunted me like some evil thought, with which you seek to come to terms. A voice said in me, “You are going to see Fœdora!” In vain I reasoned with that voice, saying that it lied to me; all my arguments were defeated by the name “Fœdora.” Was not the name, and even the woman herself, the symbol of all my desires, and the object of my life?’

‘The name called up recollections of the conventional glitter of the world, the upper world of Paris with its brilliant fêtes and the tinsel of its vanities. The woman brought before me all the problems of passion on which my mind continually ran. Perhaps it was neither the woman nor the name, but my own propensities, that sprang up within me and tempted me afresh. Here was the countess Fœdora, rich and loveless, proof against the temptations of Paris; was not this woman the very incarnation of my hopes and visions? I fashioned her for myself, drew her in fancy, and dreamed of her. I could not sleep that night; I became her lover; I overbrimmed a few hours with a whole lifetime—a lover’s lifetime; the experience of its prolific delights burned me.

‘The next day I could not bear the tortures of delay ; I borrowed a novel, and spent the whole day over it, so that I could not possibly think nor keep account of the time till night. Fœdora’s name echoed through me even as I read, but only as a distant sound ; though it could be heard, it was not troublesome. Fortunately, I owned a fairly creditable black coat and a white waistcoat ; of all my fortune there now remained about thirty francs, which I had distributed about among my clothes and in my drawers, so as to erect between my whims and the spending of a five-franc piece a thorny barrier of search, and an adventurous peregrination round my room. While I was dressing, I dived about for my money in an ocean of papers. This scarcity of specie will give you some idea of the value of that squandered upon gloves and cab-hire ; a month’s bread disappeared at one fell swoop. Alas ! money is always forthcoming for our caprices ; we only grudge the cost of things that are useful or necessary. We recklessly fling gold to an opera-dancer, and haggle with a tradesman whose hungry family must wait for the settlement of our bill. How many men are there that wear a coat that cost a hundred francs, and carry a diamond in the head of their cane, and dine for twenty-five *sous* for all that ! It seems as though we could never pay enough for the pleasures of vanity.

‘Rastignac, punctual to his appointment, smiled at the transformation, and joked about it. On the way he gave me benevolent advice as to my conduct with the countess ; he described her as mean, vain, and suspicious ; but though mean, she was ostentatious, her vanity was transparent, and her mistrust good-humoured.

“You know I am pledged,” he said, “and what I should lose, too, if I tried a change in love. So my observation of Fœdora has been quite cool and disinterested, and my remarks must have some truth in them. I was looking to your future when I thought of introducing you to her ; so mind very carefully what I am about to say.

She has a terrible memory. She is clever enough to drive a diplomatist wild; she would know it at once if he spoke the truth. Between ourselves, I fancy that her marriage was not recognised by the Emperor, for the Russian ambassador began to smile when I spoke of her; he does not receive her either, and only bows very coolly if he meets her in the Bois. For all that, she is in Madame de Serizy's set, and visits Mesdames de Nucingen and de Restaud. There is no cloud over her here in France; the Duchesse de Carigliano, the most strait-laced *maréchale* in the whole Bonapartist coterie, often goes to spend the summer with her at her country house. Plenty of young fops, sons of peers of France, have offered her a title in exchange for her fortune, and she has politely declined them all. Her susceptibilities, may be, are not to be touched by anything less than a count. Aren't you a marquis? Go ahead if you fancy her. This is what you may call receiving your instructions."

'His raillery made me think that Rastignac wished to joke and excite my curiosity, so that I was in a paroxysm of my extemporised passion by the time that we stopped before a peristyle full of flowers. My heart beat and my colour rose as we went up the great carpeted staircase, and I noticed about me all the studied refinements of English comfort; I was infatuatedly *bourgeois*; I forgot my origin and all my personal and family pride. Alas! I had but just left a garret, after three years of poverty, and I could not just then set the treasures there acquired above such trifles as these. Nor could I rightly estimate the worth of the vast intellectual capital which turns to riches at the moment when opportunity comes within our reach, opportunity that does not overwhelm, because study has prepared us for the struggles of public life.

'I found a woman of about twenty-two years of age; she was of average height, was dressed in white, and held a feather fire-screen in her hand; a group of men stood around her. She rose at the sight of Rastignac, and

came towards us with a gracious smile and a musically-uttered compliment, prepared no doubt beforehand, for me. Our friend had spoken of me as a rising man, and his clever way of making the most of me had procured me this flattering reception. I was confused by the attention that every one paid to me; but Rastignac had luckily mentioned my modesty. I was brought in contact with scholars, men of letters, ex-ministers, and peers of France. The conversation, interrupted a while by my coming, was resumed. I took courage, feeling that I had a reputation to maintain, and without abusing my privilege, I spoke when it fell to me to speak, trying to state the questions at issue in words more or less profound, witty or trenchant, and I made a certain sensation. Rastignac was a prophet for the thousandth time in his life. As soon as the gathering was large enough to restore freedom to individuals, he took my arm, and we went round the rooms.

“Don't look as if you were too much struck by the princess,” he said, “or she will guess your object in coming to visit her.”

‘The rooms were furnished in excellent taste. Each apartment had a character of its own, as in wealthy English houses; and the silken hangings, the style of the furniture, and the ornaments, even the most trifling, were all subordinated to the original idea. In a gothic boudoir the doors were concealed by tapestried curtains, and the panelling by hangings; the clock and the pattern of the carpet were made to harmonise with the gothic surroundings. The ceiling, with its carved cross-beams of brown wood, was full of charm and originality; the panels were beautifully wrought; nothing disturbed the general harmony of the scheme of decoration, not even the windows with their rich coloured glass. I was surprised by the extensive knowledge of decoration that some artist had brought to bear on a little modern room, it was so pleasant and fresh, and not heavy, but subdued with its

dead gold hues. It had all the vague sentiment of a German ballad; it was a retreat fit for some romance of 1827, perfumed by the exotic flowers set in their stands. Another apartment in the suite was a gilded reproduction of the Louis Quatorze period, with modern paintings on the walls in odd but pleasant contrast.

“You would not be so badly lodged,” was Rastignac’s slightly sarcastic comment. “It is captivating, isn’t it?” he added, smiling as he sat down. Then suddenly he rose, and led me by the hand into a bedroom, where the softened light fell upon the bed under its canopy of muslin and white watered silk—a couch for a young fairy betrothed to one of the genii.

“Isn’t it wantonly bad taste, insolent and unbounded coquetry,” he said, lowering his voice, “that allows us to see this throne of love? She gives herself to no one, and anybody may leave his card here. If I were not committed, I should like to see her at my feet all tears and submission.”

“Are you so certain of her virtue?”

“The boldest and even the cleverest adventurers among us, acknowledge themselves defeated, and continue to be her lovers and devoted friends. Isn’t that woman a puzzle?”

His words seemed to intoxicate me; I had jealous fears already of the past. I leapt for joy, and hurried back to the countess, whom I had seen in the gothic boudoir. She stopped me by a smile, made me sit beside her, and talked about my work, seeming to take the greatest interest in it, and all the more when I set forth my theories amusingly, instead of adopting the formal language of a professor for their explanation. It seemed to divert her to be told that the human will was a material force like steam; that in the moral world nothing could resist its power if a man taught himself to concentrate it, to economise it, and to project continually its fluid mass in given directions upon other souls. Such a man, I said, could

modify all things relatively to man, even the peremptory laws of nature. The questions Fœdora raised showed a certain keenness of intellect. I took a pleasure in deciding some of them in her favour, in order to flatter her; then I confuted her feminine reasoning with a word, and roused her curiosity by drawing her attention to an everyday matter—to sleep, a thing so apparently commonplace, that in reality is an insoluble problem for science. The countess sat in silence for a moment when I told her that our ideas were complete organic beings, existing in an invisible world, and influencing our destinies; and for witnesses I cited the opinions of Descartes, Diderot, and Napoleon, who had directed, and still directed, all the currents of the age.

‘So I had the honour of amusing this woman; she asked me to come to see her when she left me; giving me *les grande entrées*, in the language of the court. Whether it was by dint of substituting polite formulas for genuine expressions of feeling, a commendable habit of mine, or because Fœdora hailed in me a coming celebrity, an addition to her learned menagerie; for some reason I thought I had pleased her. I called all my previous physiological studies and knowledge of woman to my aid, and minutely scrutinised this singular person and her ways all the evening. I concealed myself in the embrasure of a window, and sought to discover her thoughts from her bearing. I studied the tactics of the mistress of the house, as she came and went, sat and chatted, beckoned to this one or that, asked questions, listened to the answers, as she leaned against the frame of the door; I detected a languid charm in her movements, a grace in the flutterings of her dress, remarked the nature of the feelings she so powerfully excited, and became very incredulous as to her virtue. If Fœdora would none of love to-day, she had had strong passions at some time; past experience of pleasure showed itself in the attitudes she chose in conversation, in her coquettish way of leaning

against the panel behind her, she seemed scarcely able to stand alone, and yet ready for flight from too bold a glance. There was a kind of eloquence about her lightly folded arms, which, even for benevolent eyes, breathed sentiment. Her fresh red lips sharply contrasted with her brilliantly pale complexion. Her brown hair brought out all the golden colour in her eyes, in which blue streaks mingled as in Florentine marble; their expression seemed to increase the significance of her words. A studied grace lay in the charms of her bodice. Perhaps a rival might have found the lines of the thick eyebrows, which almost met, a little hard; or found a fault in the almost invisible down that covered her features. I saw the signs of passion everywhere, written on those Italian eyelids, on the splendid shoulders worthy of the Venus of Milo, on her features, in the darker shade of down above a somewhat thick under-lip. She was not merely a woman, but a romance. The whole blended harmony of lines, the feminine luxuriance of her frame, and its passionate promise, were subdued by a constant inexplicable reserve and modesty at variance with everything else about her. It needed an observation as keen as my own to detect such signs as these in her character. To explain myself more clearly; there were two women in Fœdora, divided perhaps by the line between head and body: the one, the head alone, seemed to be susceptible, and the other phlegmatic. She prepared her glance before she looked at you, something unspeakably mysterious, some inward convulsion seemed revealed by her glittering eyes.

‘So, to be brief, either my imperfect moral science had left me a good deal to learn in the moral world, or a lofty soul dwelt in the countess, lent to her face those charms that fascinated and subdued us, and gave her an ascendancy only the more complete because it comprehended a sympathy of desire.

‘I went away completely enraptured with this woman, dazzled by the luxury around her, gratified in every faculty

of my soul—noble and base, good and evil. When I felt myself so excited, eager, and elated, I thought I understood the attraction that drew thither those artists, diplomatists, men in office, those stock-jobbers encased in triple brass. They came, no doubt, to find in her society the delirious emotion that now thrilled through every fibre in me, throbbing through my brain, setting the blood a-tingle in every vein, fretting even the tiniest nerve. And she had given herself to none, so as to keep them all. A woman is a coquette so long as she knows not love.

“Well,” I said to Rastignac, “they married her, or sold her perhaps, to some old man, and recollections of her first marriage have caused her aversion for love.”

‘I walked home from the Faubourg St. Honoré, where Fœdora lived. Almost all the breadth of Paris lies between her mansion and the Rue des Cordiers, but the distance seemed short, in spite of the cold. And I was to lay siege to Fœdora’s heart, in winter, and a bitter winter, with only thirty francs in my possession, and such a distance as that lay between us! Only a poor man knows what such a passion costs in cab-hire, gloves, linen, tailor’s bills, and the like. If the Platonic stage lasts a little too long, the affair grows ruinous. As a matter of fact, there is many a Lauzun among students of law, who finds it impossible to approach a lady-love living on a first floor. And I, sickly, thin, poorly dressed, wan and pale as any artist convalescent after a work, how could I compete with other young men, curled, handsome, smart, outcravating Croatia; wealthy men, equipped with tilburys, and armed with assurance?’

“Bah, death or Fœdora!” I cried, as I went round by a bridge; “my fortune lies in Fœdora.”

‘That gothic boudoir and Louis Quatorze saion came before my eyes. I saw the countess again in her white dress with its large graceful sleeves, and all the fascinations of her form and movements. These pictures of Fœdora and her luxurious surroundings haunted me even

in my bare, cold garret, when at last I reached it, as dishevelled as any naturalist's wig. The contrast suggested evil counsel; in such a way crimes are conceived. I cursed my honest, self-respecting poverty, my garret where such teeming fancies had stirred within me. I trembled with fury, I reproached God, the devil, social conditions, my own father, the whole universe, indeed, with my fate and my misfortunes. I went hungry to bed, muttering ludicrous imprecations, but fully determined to win Fœdora. Her heart was my last ticket in the lottery, my fortune depended upon it.

‘I spare you the history of my earlier visits, to reach the drama the sooner. In my efforts to appeal to her, I essayed to engage her intellect and her vanity on my side; in order to secure her love, I gave her any quantity of reasons for increasing her self-esteem; I never left her in a state of indifference; women like emotions at any cost, I gave them to her in plenty; I would rather have had her angry with me than indifferent.

‘At first, urged by a strong will and a desire for her love, I assumed a little authority, but my own feelings grew stronger and mastered me; I relapsed into truth, I lost my head, and fell desperately in love.

‘I am not very sure what we mean by the word love in our poetry and our talk; but I know that I have never found in all the ready rhetorical phrases of Jean Jacques Rousseau, in whose room perhaps I was lodging; nor among the feeble inventions of two centuries of our literature, nor in any picture that Italy has produced, a representation of the feelings that expanded all at once in my double nature. The view of the lake of Bienné, some music of Rossini's, the Madonna of Murillo's now in the possession of General Soult, Lescombat's letters, a few sayings scattered through collections of anecdotes; but most of all the prayers of religious ecstasies, and passages in our *fabliaux*,—these things alone have power to carry me back to the divine heights of my first love.

‘Nothing expressed in human language, no thought reproducible in colour, marble, sound, or articulate speech, could ever render the force, the truth, the completeness, the suddenness with which love awoke in me. To speak of art, is to speak of illusion. Love passes through endless transformations before it passes for ever into our existence and makes it glow with its own colour of flame. The process is imperceptible, and baffles the artist’s analysis. Its moans and complaints are tedious to an uninterested spectator. One would need to be very much in love to share the furious transports of Lovelace, as one reads *Clarissa Harlowe*. Love is like some fresh spring, that leaves its cresses, its gravel bed and flowers, to become first a stream and then a river, changing its aspect and its nature as it flows to plunge itself in some boundless ocean, where restricted natures only find monotony, but where great souls are engulfed in endless contemplation.

‘How can I dare to describe the hues of fleeting emotions, the nothings beyond all price, the spoken accents that beggar language, the looks that hold more than all the wealth of poetry? Not one of the mysterious scenes that draw us insensibly nearer and nearer to a woman, but has depths in it which can swallow up all the poetry that ever was written. How can the inner life and mystery that stirs in our souls penetrate through our glazes, when we have not even words to describe the visible and outward mysteries of beauty? What enchantment steeped me for how many hours in unspeakable rapture, filled with the sight of Her! What made me happy? I know not. That face of hers overflowed with light at such times; it seemed in some way to glow with it; the outlines of her face, with the scarcely perceptible down on its delicate surface, shone with a beauty belonging to the far distant horizon that melts into the sunlight. The light of day seemed to caress her as she mingled in it; rather it seemed that the light of her eyes was brighter than the daylight itself; or some

shadow passing over that fair face made a kind of change there, altering its hues and its expression. Some thought would often seem to glow on her white brows; her eyes appeared to dilate, and her eyelids trembled; a smile rippled over her features; the living coral of her lips grew full of meaning as they closed and unclosed; an indistinguishable something in her hair made brown shadows on her fair temples: in each new phase Fœdora spoke. Every slight variation in her beauty made a new pleasure for my eyes, disclosed charms my heart had never known before; I tried to read a separate emotion or a hope in every change that passed over her face. This mute converse passed between soul and soul, like sound and answering echo; and the short-lived delights then showered upon me have left indelible impressions behind. Her voice would cause a frenzy in me that I could hardly understand. I could have copied the example of some prince of Lorraine, and held a live coal in the hollow of my hand, if her fingers passed caressingly through my hair the while. I felt no longer mere admiration and desire: I was under the spell; I had met my destiny. When back again under my own roof, I still vaguely saw Fœdora in her own home, and had some indefinable share in her life; if she felt ill, I suffered too. The next day I used to say to her—

“You were not well yesterday.”

‘How often has she not stood before me, called by the power of ecstasy, in the silence of the night! Sometimes she would break in upon me like a ray of light, make me drop my pen, and put science and study to flight in grief and alarm, as she compelled my admiration by the alluring pose I had seen but a short time before. Sometimes I went to seek her in the spirit world, and would bow down to her as to a hope, entreating her to let me hear the silver sounds of her voice, and I would wake at length in tears.

‘Once, when she had promised to go to the theatre with me, she took it suddenly into her head to refuse to

go out, and begged me to leave her alone. I was in such despair over the perversity which cost me a day's work, and (if I must confess it) my last shilling as well, that I went alone where she was to have been, desiring to see the play she had wished to see. I had scarcely seated myself when an electric shock went through me. A voice told me, "She is here!" I looked round, and saw the countess hidden in the shadow at the back of her box in the first tier. My look did not waver; my eyes saw her at once with incredible clearness; my soul hovered about her life like an insect above its flower. How had my senses received this warning? There is something in these inward tremors that shallow people find astonishing, but the phenomena of our inner consciousness are produced as simply as those of external vision; so I was not surprised, but much vexed. My studies of our mental faculties, so little understood, helped me at any rate to find in my own excitement some living proofs of my theories. There was something exceedingly odd in this combination of lover and man of science, of downright idolatry of a woman with the love of knowledge. The causes of the lover's despair were highly interesting to the man of science; and the exultant lover, on the other hand, put science far away from him in his joy. Fœdora saw me, and grew grave. I annoyed her. I went to her box during the first interval, and, finding her alone, I stayed there. Although we had not spoken of love, I foresaw an explanation. I had not told her my secret, still there was a kind of understanding between us. She used to tell me her plans for amusement, and on the previous evening had asked with friendly eagerness if I meant to call next day. After any witticism of hers, she would give me an inquiring glance, as if she had sought to please me alone by it. She would soothe me if I was vexed; and if she pouted, I had in some sort a right to ask an explanation. Before she would pardon any blunder, she would keep me a suppliant for long.

All these things that we so relished, were so many lovers' quarrels. What arch grace she threw into it all! and what happiness it was to me!

'But now we stood before each other as strangers, with the close relation between us both suspended. The countess was glacial: a presentiment of trouble filled me.

"Will you come home with me?" she said, when the play was over.

'There had been a sudden change in the weather, and sleet was falling in showers as we went out. Fœdora's carriage was unable to reach the doorway of the theatre. At the sight of a well-dressed woman about to cross the street, a commissionaire held an umbrella above us, and stood waiting at the carriage-door for his tip. I would have given ten years of life just then for a couple of halfpence, but I had not a penny. All the man in me and all my vainest susceptibilities were wrung with an infernal pain. The words, "I haven't a penny about me, my good fellow!" came from me in the hard voice of thwarted passion; and yet I was that man's brother in misfortunes, as I knew too well; and once I had so lightly paid away seven hundred thousand francs! The footman pushed the man aside, and the horses sprang forward. As we returned, Fœdora, in real or feigned abstraction, answered all my questions curtly and by monosyllables. I said no more; it was a hateful moment. When we reached her house, we seated ourselves by the hearth, and when the servant had stirred the fire and left us alone, the countess turned to me with an inexplicable expression, and spoke. Her manner was almost solemn.

"Since my return to France, more than one young man, tempted by my money, has made proposals to me which would have satisfied my pride. I have come across men, too, whose attachment was so deep and sincere that they might have married me even if they had found me the penniless girl I used to be. Besides

these, Monsieur de Valentin, you must know that new titles and newly-acquired wealth have been also offered to me, and that I have never received again any of those who were so ill-advised as to mention love to me. If my regard for you was but slight, I would not give you this warning, which is dictated by friendship rather than by pride. A woman lays herself open to a rebuff of some kind, if she imagines herself to be loved, and declines, before it is uttered, to listen to language which in its nature implies a compliment. I am well acquainted with the parts played by Arsinoe and Araminta, and with the sort of answer I might look for under such circumstances; but I hope to-day that I shall not find myself misconstrued by a man of no ordinary character, because I have frankly spoken my mind."

"She spoke with the cool self-possession of some attorney or solicitor explaining the nature of a contract or the conduct of a lawsuit to a client. There was not the least sign of feeling in the clear soft tones of her voice. Her steady face and dignified bearing seemed to me now full of diplomatic reserve and coldness. She had planned this scene, no doubt, and carefully chosen her words beforehand. Oh, my friend, there are women who take pleasure in piercing hearts, and deliberately plunge the dagger back again into the wound; such women as these cannot but be worshipped, for such women either love or would fain be loved. A day comes when they make amends for all the pain they gave us; they repay us for the pangs, the keenness of which they recognise, in joys a hundredfold, even as God, they tell us, recompenses our good works. Does not their perversity spring from the strength of their feelings? But to be so tortured by a woman, who slaughters you with indifference! was not the suffering hideous?"

Fœdora did not know it, but in that minute she trampled all my hopes beneath her feet; she maimed my life and she blighted my future with the cool indifference and

unconscious barbarity of an inquisitive child who plucks its wings from a butterfly.

“Later on,” resumed Fœdora, “you will learn, I hope, the stability of the affection that I keep for my friends. You will always find that I have devotion and kindness for them. I would give my life to serve my friends ; but you could only despise me, if I allowed them to make love to me without return. That is enough. You are the only man to whom I have spoken such words as these last.”

‘At first I could not speak, or master the tempest that arose within me ; but I soon repressed my emotions in the depths of my soul, and began to smile.

“If I own that I love you,” I said, “you will banish me at once ; if I plead guilty to indifference, you will make me suffer for it. Women, magistrates, and priests never quite lay the gown aside. Silence is non-committal ; be pleased then, madame, to approve my silence. You must have feared, in some degree, to lose me, or I should not have received this friendly admonition ; and with that thought my pride ought to be satisfied. Let us banish all personal considerations. You are perhaps the only woman with whom I could discuss rationally a resolution so contrary to the laws of nature. Considered with regard to your species, you are a prodigy. Now let us investigate, in good faith, the causes of this psychological anomaly. Does there exist in you, as in many women, a certain pride in self, a love of your own loveliness, a refinement of egoism which makes you shudder at the idea of belonging to another ; is it the thought of resigning your own will and submitting to a superiority, though only of convention, which displeases you ? You would seem to me a thousand times the fairer for it. Can love formerly have brought you suffering ? You probably set some value on your dainty figure and graceful appearance, and may perhaps wish to avoid the disfigurements of maternity. Is not this one of your strongest reasons for refusing a too importunate love ? Some natural defect perhaps makes

you insusceptible in spite of yourself? Do not be angry; my study, my inquiry is absolutely dispassionate. Some are born blind, and nature may easily have formed women who in like manner are blind, deaf, and dumb to love. You are really an interesting subject for medical investigation. You do not know your value. You feel perhaps a very legitimate distaste for mankind; in that I quite concur—to me they all seem ugly and detestable. And you are right," I added, feeling my heart swell within me; "how can you do otherwise than despise us? There is not a man living who is worthy of you."

"I will not repeat all the biting words with which I ridiculed her. In vain; my bitterest sarcasms and keenest irony never made her wince nor elicited a sign of vexation. She heard me, with the customary smile upon her lips and in her eyes, the smile that she wore as a part of her clothing, and that never varied for friends, for mere acquaintances, or for strangers.

"Isn't it very nice of me to allow you to dissect me like this?" she said at last, as I came to a temporary standstill, and looked at her in silence. "You see," she went on, laughing, "that I have no foolish over-sensitiveness about my friendship. Many a woman would shut her door on you by way of punishing you for your impertinence."

"You could banish me without needing to give me the reasons for your harshness." As I spoke I felt that I could kill her if she dismissed me.

"You are mad," she said, smiling still.

"Did you never think," I went on, "of the effects of passionate love? A desperate man has often murdered his mistress."

"It is better to die than to live in misery," she said coolly. "Such a man as that would run through his wife's money, desert her, and leave her at last in utter wretchedness."

"This calm calculation dumbfounded me. The gulf

between us was made plain ; we could never understand each other.

“ Good-bye,” I said proudly.

“ Good-bye, till to-morrow,” she answered, with a little friendly bow.

For a moment's space I hurled at her in a glance all the love I must forego ; she stood there with that banal smile of hers, the detestable chill smile of a marble statue, with none of the warmth in it that it seemed to express. Can you form any idea, my friend, of the pain that overcame me on the way home through rain and snow, across a league of icy-sheeted quays, without a hope left ? Oh, to think that she not only had not guessed my poverty, but believed me to be as wealthy as she was, and likewise borne as softly over the rough ways of life ! What failure and deceit ! It was no mere question of money now, but of the fate of all that lay within me.

‘ I went at haphazard, going over the words of our strange conversation with myself. I got so thoroughly lost in my reflections that I ended by doubts as to the actual value of words and ideas. But I loved her all the same ; I loved this woman with the untouched heart that might surrender at any moment—a woman who daily disappointed the expectations of the previous evening, by appearing as a new mistress on the morrow.

‘ As I passed under the gateway of the Institute, a fevered thrill ran through me. I remembered that I was fasting, and that I had not a penny. To complete the measure of my misfortune, my hat was spoiled by the rain. How was I to appear in the drawing-room of a woman of fashion with an unpresentable hat ? I had always cursed the inane and stupid custom that compels us to exhibit the lining of our hats, and to keep them always in our hands, but with anxious care I had so far kept mine in a precarious state of efficiency. It had been neither strikingly new, nor utterly shabby, neither napless nor over-glossy, and might have passed for the hat of a frugally

given owner ; but its artificially prolonged existence had now reached the final stage, it was crumpled, forlorn, and completely ruined, a downright rag, a fitting emblem of its master. My painfully preserved elegance must collapse for want of thirty *sous*.

‘What unrecognised sacrifices I had made in the past three months for Fœdora ! How often I had given the price of a week’s sustenance to see her for a moment ! To leave my work and go without food was the least of it ! I must traverse the streets of Paris without getting splashed, run to escape showers, and reach her rooms at last, as neat and spruce as any of the coxcombs about her. For a poet and a distracted wooer the difficulties of this task were endless. My happiness, the course of my love, might be affected by a speck of mud upon my only white waistcoat ! Oh, to miss the sight of her because I was wet through and bedraggled, and had not so much as five *sous* to give to a shoeblack for removing the least little spot of mud from my boot ! The petty pangs of these nameless torments, which an irritable man finds so great, only strengthened my passion.

‘The unfortunate must make sacrifices which they may not mention to women who lead refined and luxurious lives. Such women see things through a prism that gilds all men and their surroundings. Egoism leads them to take cheerful views, and fashion makes them cruel ; they do not wish to reflect, lest they lose their happiness, and the absorbing nature of their pleasures absolves their indifference to the misfortunes of others. A penny never means millions to them ; millions, on the contrary, seem a mere trifle. Perhaps love must plead his cause by great sacrifices, but a veil must be lightly drawn across them, they must go down into silence. So when wealthy men pour out their devotion, their fortunes, and their lives, they gain somewhat by these commonly entertained opinions, an additional lustre hangs about their lovers’ follies ; their silence is eloquent ; there is a grace about the

drawn veil ; but my terrible distress bound me over to suffer fearfully or ever I might speak of my love or of dying for her sake.

‘Was it a sacrifice after all? Was I not richly rewarded by the joy I took in sacrificing everything to her? There was no commonest event of my daily life to which the countess had not given importance, had not overflowed with happiness. I had been hitherto careless of my clothes, now I respected my coat as if it had been a second self. I should not have hesitated between bodily harm and a tear in that garment. You must enter wholly into my circumstances to understand the stormy thoughts, the gathering frenzy, that shook me as I went, and which, perhaps, were increased by my walk. I gloated in an infernal fashion which I cannot describe over the absolute completeness of my wretchedness. I would have drawn from it an augury of my future, but there is no limit to the possibilities of misfortune. The door of my lodging-house stood ajar. A light streamed from the heart-shaped opening cut in the shutters. Pauline and her mother were sitting up for me and talking. I heard my name spoken, and listened.

“Raphael is much nicer-looking than the student in number seven,” said Pauline; “his fair hair is such a pretty colour. Don’t you think there is something in his voice, too, I don’t know what it is, that gives you a sort of thrill? And, then, though he may be a little proud, he is very kind, and he has such fine manners; I am sure that all the ladies must be quite wild about him.”

“You might be fond of him yourself, to hear you talk,” was Madame Gaudin’s comment.

“He is just as dear to me as a brother,” she laughed. “I should be finely ungrateful if I felt no friendship for him. Didn’t he teach me music and drawing and grammar, and everything I know in fact? You don’t much notice how I get on, dear mother; but I shall know enough, in a

while, to give lessons myself, and then we can keep a servant."

'I stole away softly, made some noise outside, and went into their room to take the lamp, that Pauline tried to light for me. The dear child had just poured soothing balm into my wounds. Her outspoken admiration had given me fresh courage. I so needed to believe in myself and to come by a just estimate of my advantages. This revival of hope in me perhaps coloured my surroundings. Perhaps also I had never before really looked at the picture that so often met my eyes, of the two women in their room; it was a scene such as Flemish painters have reproduced so faithfully for us, that I admired in its delightful reality. The mother, with the kind smile upon her lips, sat knitting stockings by the dying fire; Pauline was painting hand-screens, her brushes and paints, strewn over the tiny table, made bright spots of colour for the eye to dwell on. When she had left her seat and stood lighting my lamp, one must have been under the yoke of a terrible passion indeed, not to admire her faintly flushed transparent hands, the girlish charm of her attitude, the ideal grace of her head, as the lamplight fell full on her pale face. Night and silence added to the charms of this industrious vigil and peaceful interior. The light-heartedness that sustained such continuous toil could only spring from devout submission and the lofty feelings that it brings.

'There was an indescribable harmony between them and their possessions. The splendour of Fœdora's home did not satisfy; it called out all my worst instincts; something in this lowly poverty and unfeigned goodness revived me. It may have been that luxury abased me in my own eyes, while here my self-respect was restored to me, as I sought to extend the protection that a man is so eager to make felt, over these two women, who in the bare simplicity of the existence in their brown room seemed to live wholly in the feelings of their hearts. As I came up to

Pauline, she looked at me in an almost motherly way ; her hands shook a little as she held the lamp, so that the light fell on me, and cried—

“ Dieu ! how pale you are ! and you are wet through ! My mother will try to wipe you dry. Monsieur Raphael,” she went on, after a little pause, “ you are so very fond of milk, and to-night we happen to have some cream. Here, will you not take some ? ”

“ She pounced like a kitten, on a china bowl full of milk. She did it so quickly, and put it before me so prettily, that I hesitated.

“ “ You are going to refuse me ? ” she said, and her tones changed.

“ The pride in each felt for the other’s pride. It was Pauline’s poverty that seemed to humiliate her, and to reproach me with my want of consideration, and I melted at once, and accepted the cream that might have been meant for her morning’s breakfast. The poor child tried not to show her joy, but her eyes sparkled.

“ “ I needed it badly,” I said as I sat down. (An anxious look passed over her face.) “ Do you remember that passage, Pauline, where Bossuet tells how God gave more abundant reward for a cup of cold water than for a victory ? ”

“ “ Yes,” she said, her heart beating like some wild bird’s in a child’s hands.

“ “ Well, as we shall part very soon, now,” I went on in an unsteady voice, “ you must let me show my gratitude to you and to your mother for all the care you have taken of me.”

“ “ Oh, don’t let us cast accounts,” she said, laughing. But her laughter covered an agitation that gave me pain. I went on without appearing to hear her words—

“ “ My piano is one of Erard’s best instruments ; and you must take it. Pray accept it without hesitation ; I really could not take it with me on the journey I am about to make.”

“ “ Perhaps the melancholy tones in which I spoke

enlightened the two women, for they seemed to understand, and eyed me with curiosity and alarm. Here was the affection that I had looked for in the glacial regions of the great world, true affection, unostentatious but tender, and possibly lasting.

“Don't take it to heart so,” the mother said; “stay on here. My husband is on his way towards us even now,” she went on. “I looked into the Gospel of St. John this evening while Pauline hung our door-key in a Bible from her fingers. The key turned; that means that Gaudin is in health and doing well. Pauline began again for you and for the young man in number seven—it turned for you, but not for him. We are all going to be rich. Gaudin will come back a millionaire. I dreamed once that I saw him in a ship full of serpents; luckily the water was rough, and that means gold or precious stones from over-sea.”

The silly, friendly words were like the crooning lullaby with which a mother soothes her sick child; they in a manner calmed me. There was a pleasant heartiness in the worthy woman's looks and tones, which, if it could not remove trouble, at any rate soothed and quieted it, and deadened the pain. Pauline, keener-sighted than her mother, studied me uneasily; her quick eyes seemed to read my life and my future. I thanked the mother and daughter by an inclination of the head, and hurried away; I was afraid I should break down.

I found myself alone under my roof, and laid myself down in my misery. My unhappy imagination suggested numberless baseless projects, and prescribed impossible resolutions. When a man is struggling in the wreck of his fortunes, he is not quite without resources, but I was engulfed. Ah, my dear fellow, we are too ready to blame the wretched. Let us be less harsh on the results of the most powerful of all social solvents. Where poverty is absolute there exist no such things as shame or crime, or virtue or intelligence. I knew not what to do; I was as defenceless as a maiden on her knees before

a beast of prey. A penniless man who has no ties to bind him is master of himself at any rate, but a luckless wretch who is in love no longer belongs to himself, and may not take his own life. Love makes us almost sacred in our own eyes; it is the life of another that we revere within us; then and so begins for us the cruellest trouble of all—the misery with a hope in it, a hope for which we must even bear our torments. I thought I would go to Rastignac on the morrow to confide Fœdora's strange resolution to him, and with that I slept.

“Ah, ha!” cried Rastignac, as he saw me enter his lodging at nine o'clock in the morning. “I know what brings you here. Fœdora has dismissed you. Some kind souls, who were jealous of your ascendancy over the countess, gave out that you were going to be married. Heaven only knows what follies your rivals have equipped you with, and what slanders have been directed at you.”

“That explains everything!” I exclaimed. I remembered all my presumptuous speeches, and gave the countess credit for no little magnanimity. It pleased me to think that I was a miscreant who had not been punished nearly enough, and I saw nothing in her indulgence but the long-suffering charity of love.

“Not quite so fast,” urged the prudent Gascon; “Fœdora has all the sagacity natural to a profoundly selfish woman; perhaps she may have taken your measure while you still coveted only her money and her splendour; in spite of all your care, she could have read you through and through. She can dissemble far too well to let any dissimulation pass undetected. I fear,” he went on, “that I have brought you into a bad way. In spite of her cleverness and her tact, she seems to me a domineering sort of person, like every woman who can only feel pleasure through her brain. Happiness for her lies entirely in a comfortable life and in social pleasures; her sentiment is only assumed; she will make you miserable; you will be her head footman.”

‘He spoke to the deaf. I broke in upon him, disclosing, with an affectation of light-heartedness, the state of my finances.

“‘Yesterday evening,” he rejoined, “luck ran against me, and that carried off all my available cash. But for that trivial mishap, I would gladly have shared my purse with you. But let us go and breakfast at the restaurant; perhaps there is good counsel in oysters.”

‘He dressed, and had his tilbury brought round. We went to the Café de Paris like a couple of millionaires, armed with all the audacious impertinence of the speculator whose capital is imaginary. That devil of a Gascon quite disconcerted me by the coolness of his manners and his absolute self-possession. While we were taking coffee after an excellent and well-ordered repast, a young dandy entered, who did not escape Rastignac. He had been nodding here and there among the crowd to this or that young man, distinguished both by personal attractions and elegant attire, and now he said to me—

“‘Here’s your man,” as he beckoned to this gentleman with a wonderful cravat, who seemed to be looking for a table that suited his ideas.

“‘That rogue has been decorated for bringing out books that he doesn’t understand a word of,” whispered Rastignac; “he is a chemist, a historian, a novelist, and a political writer; he has gone halves, thirds, or quarters in the authorship of I don’t know how many plays, and he is as ignorant as Dom Miguel’s mule. He is not a man so much as a name, a label that the public is familiar with. So he would do well to avoid shops inscribed with the motto, “*Ici l’on peut écrire soi-même.*” He is acute enough to deceive an entire congress of diplomatists. In a couple of words, he is a moral half-caste, not quite a fraud, nor entirely genuine. But, hush! he has succeeded already; nobody asks anything further, and every one calls him an illustrious man.”

“‘Well, my esteemed and excellent friend, and how

may Your Intelligence be ?” So Rastignac addressed the stranger as he sat down at a neighbouring table.

“Neither well nor ill ; I am overwhelmed with work. I have all the necessary materials for some very curious historical memoirs in my hands, and I cannot find any one to whom I can ascribe them. It worries me, for I shall have to be quick about it. Memoirs are falling out of fashion.”

“What are the memoirs—contemporaneous, ancient, or memoirs of the court, or what ?”

“They relate to the Necklace affair.”

“Now, isn’t that a coincidence ?” said Rastignac, turning to me and laughing. He looked again to the literary speculation, and said, indicating me—

“This is M. de Valentin, one of my friends, whom I must introduce to you as one of our future literary celebrities. He had formerly an aunt, a marquise, much in favour once at court, and for about two years he has been writing a Royalist history of the Revolution.”

‘Then, bending over this singular man of business, he went on—

“He is a man of talent, and a simpleton that will do your memoirs for you, in his aunt’s name, for a hundred crowns a volume.”

“It’s a bargain,” said the other, adjusting his cravat. “Waiter, my oysters.”

“Yes, but you must give me twenty-five louis as commission, and you will pay him in advance for each volume,” said Rastignac.

“No, no. He shall only have fifty crowns on account, and then I shall be sure of having my manuscript punctually.”

“Rastignac repeated this business conversation to me in low tones ; and then, without giving me any voice in the matter, he replied—

“We agree to your proposal. When can we call upon you to arrange the affair ?”

“Oh, well! Come and dine here to-morrow at seven o'clock.”

‘We rose. Rastignac flung some money to the waiter, put the bill in his pocket, and we went out. I was quite stupefied by the flippancy and ease with which he had sold my venerable aunt, la Marquise de Montbauron.

“I would sooner take ship for the Brazils, and give the Indians lessons in algebra, though I don't know a word of it, than tarnish my family name.”

‘Rastignac burst out laughing.

“How dense you are! Take the fifty crowns in the first instance, and write the memoirs. When you have finished them, you will decline to publish them in your aunt's name, imbecile! Madame de Montbauron, with her hooped petticoat, her rank and beauty, rouge and slippers, and her death upon the scaffold, is worth a great deal more than six hundred francs. And then, if the trade will not give your aunt her due, some old adventurer, or some shady countess or other, will be found to put her name to the memoirs.”

“Oh,” I groaned; “why did I quit the blameless life in my garret? This world has aspects that are very vilely dishonourable.”

“Yes,” said Rastignac, “that is all very poetical, but this is a matter of business. What a child you are! Now, listen to me. As to your work, the public will decide upon it; and as for my literary middle-man, hasn't he devoted eight years of his life to obtaining a footing in the book-trade, and paid heavily for his experience? You divide the money and the labour of the book with him very unequally, but isn't yours the better part? Twenty-five louis means as much to you as a thousand francs does to him. Come, you can write historical memoirs, a work of art such as never was, since Diderot once wrote six sermons for a hundred crowns?”

“After all,” I said, in agitation, “I cannot choose but

do it. So, my dear friend, my thanks are due to you. I shall be quite rich with twenty-five louis."

"Richer than you think," he laughed. "If I have my commission from Finot in this matter, it goes to you, can't you see? Now let us go to the Bois de Boulogne," he said; "we shall see your countess there, and I will show you the pretty little widow that I am to marry—a charming woman, an Alsacienne, rather plump. She reads Kant, Schiller, Jean Paul, and a host of lachrymose books. She has a mania for continually asking my opinion, and I have to look as if I entered into all this German sensibility, and to know a pack of ballads—drugs, all of them, that my doctor absolutely prohibits. As yet I have not been able to wean her from her literary enthusiasms; she sheds torrents of tears as she reads Goethe, and I have to weep a little myself to please her, for she has an income of fifty thousand livres, my dear boy, and the prettiest little hand and foot in the world. Oh, if she would only say *mon ange* and *brouiller* instead of *mon anche* and *prouiller*, she would be perfection!"

"We saw the countess, radiant amid the splendours of her equipage. The coquette bowed very graciously to us both, and the smile she gave me seemed to me to be divine and full of love. I was very happy; I fancied myself beloved; I had money, a wealth of love in my heart, and my troubles were over. I was light-hearted, blithe, and content. I found my friend's lady-love charming. Earth and air and heaven—all nature—seemed to reflect Fœdora's smile for me.

"As we returned through the Champs-Élysées, we paid a visit to Rastignac's hatter and tailor. Thanks to the "Necklace," my insignificant peace-footing was to end, and I made formidable preparations for a campaign. Henceforward I need not shrink from a contest with the spruce and fashionable young men who made Fœdora's circle. I went home, locked myself in, and stood by my dormer window, outwardly calm enough, but in

reality I bade a last good-bye to the roofs without. I began to live in the future, rehearsed my life drama, and discounted love and its happiness. Ah, how stormy life can grow to be within the four walls of a garret! The soul within us is like a fairy; she turns straw into diamonds for us; and for us, at a touch of her wand, enchanted palaces arise, as flowers in the meadows spring up towards the sun.

'Towards noon, next day, Pauline knocked gently at my door, and brought me—who could guess it?—a note from Fœdora. The countess asked me to take her to the Luxembourg, and to go thence to see with her the Museum and Jardin des Plantes.

"The man is waiting for an answer," said Pauline, after quietly waiting for a moment.

'I hastily scrawled my acknowledgments, and Pauline took the note. I changed my dress. When my toilette was ended, and I looked at myself with some complaisance, an icy shiver ran through me as I thought—

"Will Fœdora walk or drive? Will it rain or shine?—No matter, though," I said to myself; "whichever it is, can one ever reckon with feminine caprice? She will have no money about her, and will want to give a dozen francs to some little Savoyard because his rags are picturesque."

'I had not a brass farthing, and should have no money till the evening came. How dearly a poet pays for the intellectual prowess that method and toil have brought him, at such crises of our youth! Innumerable painfully vivid thoughts pierced me like barbs. I looked out of my window; the weather was very unsettled. If things fell out badly, I might easily hire a cab for the day; but would not the fear lie on me every moment that I might not meet Finot in the evening? I felt too weak to endure such fears in the midst of my felicity. Though I felt sure that I should find nothing, I began a grand search through my room; I looked for imaginary coins

in the recesses of my mattress; I hunted about everywhere—I even shook out my old boots. A nervous fever seized me; I looked with wild eyes at the furniture when I had ransacked it all. Will you understand, I wonder, the excitement that possessed me when, plunged deep in the listlessness of despair, I opened my writing-table drawer, and found a fair and splendid ten-franc piece that shone like a rising star, new and sparkling, and slyly hiding in a cranny between two boards? I did not try to account for its previous reserve and the cruelty of which it had been guilty in thus lying hidden; I kissed it for a friend faithful in adversity, and hailed it with a cry that found an echo, and made me turn sharply, to find Pauline with a face grown white.

“I thought,” she faltered, “that you had hurt yourself! The man who brought the letter——” (she broke off as if something smothered her voice). “But mother has paid him,” she added, and flitted away like a wayward, capricious child. Poor little one! I wanted her to share my happiness. I seemed to have all the happiness in the world within me just then; and I would fain have returned to the unhappy, all that I felt as if I had stolen from them.

“The intuitive perception of adversity is sound for the most part; the countess had sent away her carriage. One of those freaks that pretty women can scarcely explain to themselves had determined her to go on foot, by way of the boulevards, to the Jardin des Plantes.

“It will rain,” I told her, and it pleased her to contradict me.

“As it fell out, the weather was fine while we went through the Luxembourg; when we came out, some drops fell from a great cloud, whose progress I had watched uneasily, and we took a cab. At the Museum I was about to dismiss the vehicle, and Fœdora (what agonies!) asked me not to do so. But it was like a dream in broad daylight for me, to chat with her, to

wander in the Jardin des Plantes, to stray down the shady alleys, to feel her hand upon my arm; the secret transports repressed in me were reduced, no doubt, to a fixed and foolish smile upon my lips; there was something unreal about it all. Yet in all her movements, however alluring, whether we stood or whether we walked, there was nothing either tender or lover-like. When I tried to share in a measure the action of movement prompted by her life, I became aware of a check, or of something strange in her that I cannot explain, of an inner activity concealed in her nature. There is no suavity about the movements of women who have no soul in them. Our wills were opposed, and we did not keep step together. Words are wanting to describe this outward dissonance between two beings; we are not accustomed to read a thought in a movement. We instinctively feel this phenomenon of our nature, but it cannot be expressed.

‘I did not dissect my sensations during those violent seizures of passion,’ Raphael went on, after a moment of silence, as if he were replying to an objection raised by himself. ‘I did not analyse my pleasures nor count my heart-beats then, as a miser scrutinises and weighs his gold pieces. No; experience sheds its melancholy light over the events of the past to-day, and memory brings these pictures back, as the sea-waves in fair weather cast up fragment after fragment of the débris of a wrecked vessel upon the strand.

“It is in your power to render me a rather important service,” said the countess, looking at me in an embarrassed way. “After confiding to you my aversion for lovers, I feel myself more at liberty to entreat your good offices in the name of friendship. Will there not be very much more merit in obliging me to-day?” she asked, laughing.

‘I looked at her in anguish. Her manner was coaxing, but in no wise affectionate; she felt nothing for me; she

seemed to be playing a part, and I thought her a consummate actress. Then all at once my hopes awoke once more, at a single look and word. Yet if reviving love expressed itself in my eyes, she bore its light without any change in the clearness of her own; they seemed, like a tiger's eyes, to have a sheet of metal behind them. I used to hate her in such moments.

“The influence of the Duc de Navarreins would be very useful to me, with an all-powerful person in Russia,” she went on, persuasion in every modulation of her voice, “whose intervention I need in order to have justice done me in a matter that concerns both my fortune and my position in the world, that is to say, the recognition of my marriage by the Emperor. Is not the Duc de Navarreins a cousin of yours? A letter from him would settle everything.”

“I am yours,” I answered; “command me.”

“You are very nice,” she said, pressing my hand. “Come and have dinner with me, and I will tell you everything, as if you were my confessor.”

So this discreet, suspicious woman, who had never been heard to speak a word about her affairs to any one, was going to consult me.

“Oh, how dear to me is this silence that you have imposed on me!” I cried; “but I would rather have had some sharper ordeal still.” And she smiled upon the intoxication in my eyes; she did not reject my admiration in any way; surely she loved me!

Fortunately, my purse held just enough to satisfy the cabman. The day spent in her house, alone with her, was delicious; it was the first time that I had seen her in this way. Hitherto we had always been kept apart by the presence of others, and by her formal politeness and reserved manners, even during her magnificent dinners; but now it was as if I lived beneath her own roof—I had her all to myself, so to speak. My wandering fancy broke down barriers, arranged the events of life to my

liking, and steeped me in happiness and love. I seemed to myself her husband, I liked to watch her busied with little details ; it was a pleasure to me even to see her take off her bonnet and shawl. She left me alone for a little, and came back, charming, with her hair newly arranged ; and this dainty change of toilette had been made for me !

‘ During the dinner she lavished attention upon me, and put charm without end into those numberless trifles to all seeming, that make up half of our existence nevertheless. As we sat together before a crackling fire, on silken cushions, surrounded by the most desirable creations of Oriental luxury ; as I saw this woman whose famous beauty made every heart beat, so close to me ; an unapproachable woman who was talking and bringing all her powers of coquetry to bear upon me ; then my blissful pleasure rose almost to the point of suffering. To my vexation, I recollected the important business to be concluded ; I determined to go to keep the appointment made for me for this evening.

“ So soon ? ” she said, seeing me take my hat.

‘ She loved me, then ! or I thought so at least, from the bland tones in which those two words were uttered. I would then have bartered a couple of years of life for every hour she chose to grant me, and so prolong my ecstasy. My happiness was increased by the extent of the money I sacrificed. It was midnight before she dismissed me. But on the morrow, for all that, my heroism cost me a good many remorseful pangs ; I was afraid the affair of the Memoirs, now of such importance for me, might have fallen through, and rushed off to Rastignac. We found the nominal author of my future labours just getting up.

‘ Finot read over a brief agreement to me, in which nothing whatever was said about my aunt, and when it had been signed he paid me down fifty crowns, and the three of us breakfasted together. I had only thirty francs left over, when I had paid for my new hat, for sixty

tickets at thirty sous each, and settled my debts; but for some days to come the difficulties of living were removed. If I had but listened to Rastignac, I might have had abundance by frankly adopting the "English system." He really wanted to establish my credit by setting me to raise loans, on the theory that borrowing is the basis of credit. To hear him talk, the future was the largest and most secure kind of capital in the world. My future luck was hypothecated for the benefit of my creditors, and he gave my custom to his tailor, an artist, and a young man's tailor, who was to leave me in peace until I married.

"The monastic life of study that I had led for three years past ended on this day. I frequented Fœdora's house very diligently, and tried to outshine the heroes or the swaggerers to be found in her circle. When I believed that I had left poverty for ever behind me, I regained my freedom of mind, humiliated my rivals, and was looked upon as a very attractive, dazzling, and irresistible sort of man. But acute folk used to say with regard to me, "A fellow as clever as that will keep all his enthusiasms in his brain," and charitably extolled my faculties at the expense of my feelings. "Isn't he lucky, not to be in love!" they exclaimed. "If he were, could he be so light-hearted and animated?" Yet in Fœdora's presence I was as dull as love could make me. When I was alone with her, I had not a word to say, or if I did speak, I renounced love; and I affected gaiety but ill, like a courtier who has a bitter mortification to hide. I tried in every way to make myself indispensable in her life, and necessary to her vanity and to her comfort; I was a plaything at her pleasure, a slave always at her side. And when I had frittered away the day in this way, I went back to my work at night, securing merely two or three hours' sleep in the early morning.

"But I had not, like Rastignac, the "English system" at my finger-ends, and I very soon saw myself without a penny. I fell at once into that precarious way of life

which industriously hides cold and miserable depths beneath an elusive surface of luxury; I was a coxcomb without conquests, a penniless fop, a nameless gallant. The old sufferings were renewed, but less sharply; no doubt I was growing used to the painful crises. Very often my sole diet consisted of the scanty provision of cakes and tea that is offered in drawing-rooms, or one of the countess's great dinners must sustain me for two whole days. I used all my time, and exerted every effort and all my powers of observation, to penetrate the impenetrable character of Fœdora. Alternate hope and despair had swayed my opinions; for me she was sometimes the tenderest, sometimes the most unfeeling of women. But these transitions from joy to sadness became unendurable; I sought to end the horrible conflict within me by extinguishing love. By the light of warning gleams my soul sometimes recognised the gulfs that lay between us. The countess confirmed all my fears; I had never yet detected any tear in her eyes; an affecting scene in a play left her smiling and unmoved. All her instincts were selfish; she could not divine another's joy or sorrow. She had made a fool of me, in fact!

'I had rejoiced over a sacrifice to make for her, and almost humiliated myself in seeking out my kinsman, the Duc de Navarreins, a selfish man who was ashamed of my poverty, and had injured me too deeply not to hate me. He received me with the polite coldness that makes every word and gesture seem an insult; he looked so ill at ease that I pitied him. I blushed for this petteiness amid grandeur, and penuriousness surrounded by luxury. He began to talk to me of his heavy losses in the three per cents., and then I told him the object of my visit. The change in his manners, hitherto glacial, which now gradually became affectionate, disgusted me.

'Well, he called upon the countess, and completely eclipsed me with her.

'On him Fœdora exercised spells and witcheries unheard

of; she drew him into her power, and arranged her whole mysterious business with him; I was left out, I heard not a word of it; she had made a tool of me! She did not seem to be aware of my existence while my cousin was present; she received me less cordially perhaps than when I was first presented to her. One evening she chose to mortify me before the duke by a look, a gesture, that it is useless to try to express in words. I went away with tears in my eyes, planning terrible and outrageous schemes of vengeance without end.

'I often used to go with her to the theatre. Love utterly absorbed me as I sat beside her; as I looked at her I used to give myself up to the pleasure of listening to the music, putting all my soul into the double joy of love and of hearing every emotion of my heart translated into musical cadences. It was my passion that filled the air and the stage, that was triumphant everywhere, but with my mistress. Then I would take Fœdora's hand. I used to scan her features and her eyes, imploring of them some indication that one blended feeling possessed us both, seeking for the sudden harmony awakened by the power of music, which makes our souls vibrate in unison; but her hand was passive, her eyes said nothing.

'When the fire that burned in me glowed too fiercely from the face I turned upon her, she met it with that studied smile of hers, the conventional expression that sits on the lips of every portrait in every exhibition. She was not listening to the music. The divine pages of Rossini, Cimarosa, or Zingarelli called up no emotion, gave no voice to any poetry in her life; her soul was a desert.

'Fœdora presented herself as a drama before a drama. Her lorgnette travelled restlessly over the boxes; she was restless too beneath the apparent calm; fashion tyrannised over her; her box, her bonnet, her carriage, her own personality absorbed her entirely. My merciless knowledge thoroughly tore away all my illusions. If good breeding consists in self-forgetfulness and consideration

for others, in constantly showing gentleness in voice and bearing, in pleasing others, and in making them content in themselves, all traces of her plebeian origin were not yet obliterated in Fœdora, in spite of her cleverness. Her self-forgetfulness was a sham, her manners were not innate but painfully acquired, her politeness was rather subservient. And yet for those she singled out, her honeyed words expressed natural kindness, her pretentious exaggeration was exalted enthusiasm. I alone had scrutinised her grimacings, and stripped away the thin rind that sufficed to conceal her real nature from the world; her trickery no longer deceived me; I had sounded the depths of that feline nature. I blushed for her when some donkey or other flattered and complimented her. And yet I loved her through it all! I hoped that her snows would melt with the warmth of a poet's love. If I could only have made her heart capable of a woman's tenderness, if I could have made her feel all the greatness that lies in devotion, then I should have seen her perfected, she would have been an angel. I loved her as a man, a lover, and an artist; if it had been necessary not to love her so that I might win her, some cool-headed coxcomb, some self-possessed calculator would perhaps have had the advantage over me. She was so vain and sophisticated, that the language of vanity would appeal to her; she would have allowed herself to be taken in the toils of an intrigue; a hard, cold nature would have gained a complete ascendancy over her. Keen grief had pierced me to my very soul, as she unconsciously revealed her absolute love of self. I seemed to see her as she one day would be, alone in the world, with no one to whom she could stretch her hand, with no friendly eyes for her own to meet and rest upon. I was bold enough to set this before her one evening; I painted in vivid colours her lonely, sad, deserted old age. Her comment on this prospect of so terrible a revenge of thwarted nature was horrible.

“I shall always have money,” she said; “and with

money we can always inspire such sentiments as are necessary for our comfort in those about us."

"I went away confounded by the arguments of luxury, by the reasoning of this woman, of the world in which she lived; and blamed myself for my infatuated idolatry. I myself had not loved Pauline because she was poor; and had not the wealthy Fœdora a right to repulse Raphael? Conscience is our unerring judge until we finally stifle it. A specious voice said within me, "Fœdora is neither attracted to nor repulses any one; she has her liberty, but once upon a time she sold herself to the Russian count, her husband or her lover, for gold. But temptation is certain to enter into her life. Wait till that moment comes!" She lived remote from humanity, in a sphere apart, in a hell or a heaven of her own; she was neither frail nor virtuous. This feminine enigma in embroideries and cashmeres had brought into play every emotion of the human heart in me—pride, ambition, love, curiosity.

"There was a craze just then for praising a play at a little Boulevard theatre, prompted perhaps by a wish to appear original that besets us all, or due to some freak of fashion. The countess showed some signs of a wish to see the floured face of the actor who had so delighted several people of taste, and I obtained the honour of taking her to a first representation of some wretched farce or other. A box scarcely cost five francs, but I had not a brass farthing. I was but half-way through the volume of *Memoirs*; I dared not beg for assistance of Finot, and Rastignac, my providence, was away. These constant perplexities were the bane of my life.

"We had once come out of the theatre when it was raining heavily; Fœdora had called a cab for me before I could escape from her show of concern; she would not admit any of my excuses—my liking for wet weather, and my wish to go to the gaming-table. She did not read my poverty in my embarrassed attitude, nor in my

forced jests. My eyes would redden, but she did not understand a look. A young man's life is at the mercy of the strangest whims! At every revolution of the wheels during the journey, thoughts that burned stirred in my heart. I tried to pull up a plank from the bottom of the vehicle, hoping to slip through the hole into the street; but finding insuperable obstacles, I burst into a fit of laughter, and then sat stupefied in calm dejection, like a man in the pillory. When I reached my lodging, Pauline broke in through my first stammering words with—

“If you haven't any money——?”

‘Ah, the music of Rossini was as nothing compared with those words. But to return to the performance at the Funambules.

‘I thought of pawning the circlet of gold round my mother's portrait in order to escort the countess. Although the pawnbroker loomed in my thoughts as one of the doors of a convict's prison, I would rather myself have carried my bed thither than have begged for alms. There is something so painful in the expression of a man who asks money of you! There are loans that mulct us of our self-respect, just as some rebuffs from a friend's lips sweep away our last illusion.

‘Pauline was working; her mother had gone to bed. I flung a stealthy glance over the bed; the curtains were drawn back a little; Madame Gaudin was in a deep sleep, I thought, when I saw her quiet, sallow profile outlined against the pillow.

“You are in trouble?” Pauline said, dipping her brush into the colouring.

“It is in your power to do me a great service, my dear child,” I answered.

‘The gladness in her eyes frightened me.

“Is it possible that she loves me?” I thought. “Pauline,” I began. I went and sat near to her, so as to study her. My tones had been so searching that she read my thought; her eyes fell, and I scrutinised her face. It

was so pure and frank that I fancied I could see as clearly into her heart as into my own.

“Do you love me?” I asked.

“A little,—passionately—not a bit!” she cried.

“Then she did not love me. Her jesting tones, and a little gleeful movement that escaped her, expressed nothing beyond a girlish, blithe goodwill. I told her about my distress and the predicament in which I found myself, and asked her to help me.

“You do not wish to go to the pawnbroker’s yourself, M. Raphael,” she answered, “and yet you would send me!”

I blushed in confusion at the child’s reasoning. She took my hand in hers as if she wanted to compensate for this home-truth by her light touch upon it.

“Oh, I would willingly go,” she said, “but it is not necessary. I found two five-franc pieces at the back of the piano, that had slipped without your knowledge between the frame and the keyboard, and I laid them on your table.”

“You will soon be coming into some money, M. Raphael,” said the kind mother, showing her face between the curtains, “and I can easily lend you a few crowns meanwhile.”

“Oh, Pauline!” I cried, as I pressed her hand, “how I wish that I were rich!”

“Bah! why should you?” she said petulantly. Her hand shook in mine with the throbbing of her pulse; she snatched it away, and looked at both of mine.

“You will marry a rich wife,” she said, “but she will give you a great deal of trouble. Ah, Dieu! she will be your death,—I am sure of it.”

In her exclamation there was something like belief in her mother’s absurd superstitions.

“You are very credulous, Pauline!”

“The woman whom you will love is going to kill you—there is no doubt of it,” she said, looking at me with alarm.

'She took up her brush again and dipped it in the colour; her great agitation was evident; she looked at me no longer. I was ready to give credence just then to superstitious fancies; no man is utterly wretched so long as he is superstitious; a belief of that kind is often in reality a hope.

'I found that those two magnificent five-franc pieces were lying, in fact, upon my table when I reached my room. During the first confused thoughts of early slumber, I tried to audit my accounts so as to explain this unhopèd-for windfall; but I lost myself in useless calculations, and slept. Just as I was leaving my room to engage a box the next morning, Pauline came to see me.

"Perhaps your ten francs is not enough," said the amiable, kind-hearted girl; "my mother told me to offer you this money. Take it, please, take it!"

'She laid three crowns upon the table, and tried to escape, but I would not let her go. Admiration dried the tears that sprang to my eyes.

"You are an angel, Pauline," I said. "It is not the loan that touches me so much as the delicacy with which it is offered. I used to wish for a rich wife, a fashionable woman of rank; and now, alas! I would rather possess millions, and find some girl, as poor as you are, with a generous nature like your own; and I would renounce a fatal passion which will kill me. Perhaps what you told me will come true."

"That is enough," she said, and fled away; the fresh trills of her bird-like voice rang up the staircase.

"She is very happy in not yet knowing love," I said to myself, thinking of the torments I had endured for many months past.

'Pauline's fifteen francs were invaluable to me. Fædora, thinking of the stifling odour of the crowded place where we were to spend several hours, was sorry that she had not brought a bouquet; I went in search of flowers for

her, as I had laid already my life and my fate at her feet. With a pleasure in which compunction mingled, I gave her a bouquet. I learned from its price the extravagance of superficial gallantry in the world. But very soon she complained of the heavy scent of a Mexican jessamine. The interior of the theatre, the bare bench on which she was to sit, filled her with intolerable disgust; she upbraided me for bringing her there. Although she sat beside me, she wished to go, and she went. I had spent sleepless nights, and squandered two months of my life for her, and I could not please her. Never had that tormenting spirit been more unfeeling or more fascinating.

‘I sat beside her in the cramped back seat of the vehicle; all the way I could feel her breath on me and the contact of her perfumed glove; I saw distinctly all her exceeding beauty; I inhaled a vague scent of orris-root; so wholly a woman she was, with no touch of womanhood. Just then a sudden gleam of light lit up the depths of this mysterious life for me. I thought all at once of a book just published by a poet, a genuine conception of the artist, in the shape of the statue of Polycletus.

‘I seemed to see that monstrous creation, at one time an officer, breaking in a spirited horse; at another, a girl, who gives herself up to her toilette and breaks her lovers hearts; or again, a false lover driving a timid and gentle maid to despair. Unable to analyse Fœdora by any other process, I told her this fanciful story; but no hint of her resemblance to this poetry of the impossible crossed her—it simply diverted her; she was like a child over a story from the *Arabian Nights*.

“Fœdora must be shielded by some talisman,” I thought to myself as I went back, “or she could not resist the love of a man of my age, the infectious fever of that splendid malady of the soul. Is Fœdora, like Lady Delacour, a prey to a cancer? Her life is certainly an unnatural one.”

‘I shuddered at the thought. Then I decided on a plan, at once the wildest and the most rational that lover ever dreamed of. I would study this woman from a physical point of view, as I had already studied her intellectually, and to this end I made up my mind to spend a night in her room without her knowledge. This project preyed upon me as a thirst for revenge gnaws at the heart of a Corsican monk. This is how I carried it out. On the days when Fœdora received, her rooms were far too crowded for the hall-porter to keep the balance even between goers and comers; I could remain in the house, I felt sure, without causing a scandal in it, and I waited the countess’s coming soirée with impatience. As I dressed I put a little English penknife into my waistcoat pocket, instead of a poniard. That literary implement, if found upon me, could awaken no suspicion, but I knew not whither my romantic resolution might lead, and I wished to be prepared.

‘As soon as the rooms began to fill, I entered the bedroom and examined the arrangements. The inner and outer shutters were closed; this was a good beginning; and as the waiting-maid might come to draw back the curtains that hung over the windows, I pulled them together. I was running great risks in venturing to manoeuvre beforehand in this way, but I had accepted the situation, and had deliberately reckoned with its dangers.

‘About midnight I hid myself in the embrasure of the window. I tried to scramble on to a ledge of the wainscoting, hanging on by the fastening of the shutters with my back against the wall, in such a position that my feet could not be visible. When I had carefully considered my points of support, and the space between me and the curtains, I had become sufficiently acquainted with all the difficulties of my position to stay in it without fear of detection if undisturbed by cramp, coughs, or sneezings. To avoid useless fatigue, I remained standing until the critical moment, when I must hang suspended like a

spider in its web. The white-watered silk and muslin of the curtains spread before me in great pleats like organ-pipes. With my penknife I cut loopholes in them, through which I could see.

‘I heard vague murmurs from the salons, the laughter and the louder tones of the speakers. The smothered commotion and vague uproar lessened by slow degrees. One man and another came for his hat from the countess’s chest of drawers, close to where I stood. I shivered, if the curtains were disturbed, at the thought of the mischances consequent on the confused and hasty investigations made by the men in a hurry to depart, who were rummaging everywhere. When I experienced no misfortunes of this kind, I augured well of my enterprise. An old wooer of Fædora’s came for the last hat; he thought himself quite alone, looked at the bed, and heaved a great sigh, accompanied by some inaudible exclamation, into which he threw sufficient energy. In the boudoir close by, the countess, finding only some five or six intimate acquaintances about her, proposed tea. The scandals for which existing society has reserved the little faculty of belief that it retains, mingled with epigrams and trenchant witticisms, and the clatter of cups and spoons. Rastignac drew roars of laughter by merciless sarcasms at the expense of my rivals.

“M. de Rastignac is a man with whom it is better not to quarrel,” said the countess, laughing.

“I am quite of that opinion,” was his candid reply. “I have always been right about my aversions—and my friendships as well,” he added. “Perhaps my enemies are quite as useful to me as my friends. I have made a particular study of modern phraseology, and of the natural craft that is used in all attack or defence. Official eloquence is one of our perfect social products.

“One of your friends is not clever, so you speak of his integrity and his candour. Another’s work is heavy; you introduce it as a piece of conscientious labour; and if the

book is ill written, you extol the ideas it contains. Such an one is treacherous and fickle, slips through your fingers every moment ; bah ! he is attractive, bewitching, he is delightful ! Suppose they are enemies, you fling every one, dead or alive, in their teeth. You reverse your phraseology for their benefit, and you are as keen in detecting their faults as you were before adroit in bringing out the virtues of your friends. This way of using the mental lorgnette is the secret of conversation nowadays, and the whole art of the complete courtier. If you neglect it, you might as well go out as an unarmed knight-banneret to fight against men in armour. And I make use of it, and even abuse it at times. So we are respected—I, my friends, and, moreover, my sword is quite as sharp as my tongue."

"One of Fœdora's most fervid worshippers, whose presumption was notorious, and who even made it contribute to his success, took up the glove thrown down so scornfully by Rastignac. He began an unmeasured eulogy of me, my performances, and my character. Rastignac had overlooked this method of detraction. His sarcastic encomiums misled the countess, who sacrificed without mercy ; she betrayed my secrets, and derided my pretensions and my hopes, to divert her friends.

"There is a future before him," said Rastignac. "Some day he may be in a position to take a cruel revenge ; his talents are at least equal to his courage ; and I should consider those who attack him very rash, for he has a good memory——"

"And writes Memoirs," put in the countess, who seemed to object to the deep silence that prevailed.

"Memoirs of a sham countess, madame," replied Rastignac. "Another sort of courage is needed to write that sort of thing."

"I give him credit for plenty of courage," she answered ; "he is faithful to me."

"I was greatly tempted to show myself suddenly among the jailers, like the shade of Banquo in Macbeth. I

should have lost a mistress, but I had a friend! But love inspired me all at once, with one of those treacherous and fallacious subtleties that it can use to soothe all our pangs.

'If Fœdora loved me, I thought, she would be sure to disguise her feelings by some mocking jest. How often the heart protests against a lie on the lips!

'Well, very soon my audacious rival, left alone with the countess, rose to go.

"What! already?" asked she in a coaxing voice that set my heart beating. "Will you not give me a few more minutes? Have you nothing more to say to me? will you never sacrifice any of your pleasures for me?"

'He went away.

"Ah!" she yawned; "how very tiresome they all are!"

'She pulled a cord energetically till the sound of a bell rang through the place; then, humming a few notes of *Pria che spunti*, the countess entered her room. No one had ever heard her sing; her muteness had called forth the wildest explanations. She had promised her first lover, so it was said, who had been held captive by her talent, and whose jealousy over her stretched beyond his grave, that she would never allow others to experience a happiness that he wished to be his and his alone.

'I exerted every power of my soul to catch the sounds. Higher and higher rose the notes; Fœdora's life seemed to dilate within her; her throat poured forth all its richest tones; something well-nigh divine entered into the melody. There was a bright purity and clearness of tone in the countess's voice, a thrilling harmony which reached the heart and stirred its pulses. Musicians are seldom unemotional; a woman who could sing like that must know how to love indeed. Her beautiful voice made one more puzzle in a woman mysterious enough before. I beheld her then, as plainly as I see you at this moment. She seemed to listen to herself, to experience a secret rapture of her own; she felt, as it were, an ecstasy like that of love.

‘She stood before the hearth during the execution of the principal theme of the *rondo*; and when she ceased her face changed. She looked tired; her features seemed to alter. She had laid the mask aside; her part as an actress was over. Yet the faded look that came over her beautiful face, a result either of this performance or of the evening’s fatigues, had its charms, too.

“‘This is her real self,” I thought.

‘She set her foot on a bronze bar of the fender as if to warm it, took off her gloves, and drew over her head the gold chain from which her bejewelled scent-bottle hung. It gave me a quite indescribable pleasure to watch the feline grace of every movement; the supple grace a cat displays as it adjusts its toilette in the sun. She looked at herself in the mirror and said aloud ill-humouredly—“I did not look well this evening; my complexion is going with alarming rapidity; perhaps I ought to keep earlier hours, and give up this life of dissipation. Does Justine mean to trifle with me?” She rang again; her maid hurried in. Where she had been I cannot tell; she came in by a secret staircase. I was anxious to make a study of her. I had lodged accusations, in my romantic imaginings, against this invisible waiting-woman, a tall, well-made brunette.

“‘Did madame ring?”

“‘Yes, twice,” answered Fœdora; “are you really growing deaf nowadays?”

“‘I was preparing madame’s milk of almonds.”

‘Justine knelt down before her, unlaced her sandals and drew them off, while her mistress lay carelessly back on her cushioned armchair beside the fire, yawned, and scratched her head. Every movement was perfectly natural; there was nothing whatever to indicate the secret sufferings or emotions with which I had credited her.

“‘George must be in love!” she remarked. “I shall dismiss him. He has drawn the curtains again to-night: What does he mean by it?”

‘All the blood in my veins rushed to my heart at this observation, but no more was said about curtains.

“Life is very empty,” the countess went on. “Ah! be careful not to scratch me as you did yesterday. Just look here, I still have the marks of your nails about me,” and she held out a little silken knee. She thrust her bare feet into velvet slippers bound with swan’s-down, and unfastened her dress, while Justine prepared to comb her hair.

“You ought to marry, madame, and have children.”

“Children!” she cried; “it wants no more than that to finish me at once; and a husband! What man is there to whom I could——? Was my hair well arranged to-night?”

“Not particularly.”

“You are a fool!”

“That way of crimping your hair too much is the least becoming way possible for you. Large, smooth curls suit you a great deal better.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really, madame; that wavy style only looks nice in fair hair.”

“Marriage? never, never! Marriage is a commercial arrangement, for which I was never made.”

‘What a disheartening scene for a lover! Here was a lonely woman, without friends or kin, without the religion of love, without faith in any affection. Yet however slightly she might feel the need to pour out her heart, a craving that every human being feels, it could only be satisfied by gossiping with her maid, by trivial and indifferent talk. . . . I grieved for her.

‘Justine unlaced her. I watched her carefully when she was at last unveiled. Her maidenly form, in its rose-tinged whiteness, was visible through her shift in the taper light, as dazzling as some silver statue behind its gauze covering. No, there was no defect that need shrink from the stolen glances of love. Alas, a fair form will overcome the stoutest resolutions!

'The maid lighted the taper in the alabaster sconce that hung before the bed, while her mistress sat thoughtful and silent before the fire. Justine went for a warming-pan, turned down the bed, and helped to lay her mistress in it; then, after some further time spent in punctiliously rendering various services that showed how seriously Fœdora respected herself, her maid left her. The countess turned to and fro several times, and sighed; she was ill at ease; faint, just perceptible sounds, like signs of impatience, escaped from her lips. She reached out a hand to the table, and took a flask from it, from which she shook four or five drops of some brown liquid into some milk before taking it; again there followed some painful sighs, and the exclamation, "*Mon Dieu!*"

'The cry, and the tone in which it was uttered, wrung my heart. By degrees she lay motionless. This frightened me; but very soon I heard a sleeper's heavy, regular breathing. I drew the rustling silk curtains apart, left my post, went to the foot of the bed, and gazed at her with feelings that I cannot define. She was so enchanting as she lay like a child, with her arm above her head; but the sweetness of the fair, quiet visage, surrounded by the lace, only irritated me. I had not been prepared for the torture to which I was compelled to submit.

"*Mon Dieu!*" that scrap of a thought which I understood not, but must even take as my sole light, had suddenly modified my opinion of Fœdora. Trite or profoundly significant, frivolous or of deep import, the words might be construed as expressive of either pleasure or pain, of physical or of mental suffering. Was it a prayer or a malediction, a forecast or a memory, a fear or a regret? A whole life lay in that utterance, a life of wealth or of penury; perhaps it contained a crime!

'The mystery that lurked beneath this fair semblance of womanhood grew afresh; there were so many ways of explaining Fœdora, that she became inexplicable. A sort of language seemed to flow from between her lips. I put

thoughts and feelings into the accidents of her breathing, whether weak or regular, gentle or laboured. I shared her dreams; I would fain have divined her secrets by reading them through her slumber. I hesitated among contradictory opinions and decisions without number. I could not deny my heart to the woman I saw before me, with the calm, pure beauty in her face. I resolved to make one more effort. If I told her the story of my life, my love, my sacrifices, might I not awaken pity in her or draw a tear from her who never wept?

‘As I set all my hopes on this last experiment, the sounds in the streets showed that day was at hand. For a moment’s space I pictured Fœdora waking to find herself in my arms. I could have stolen softly to her side and slipped them about her in a close embrace. Resolved to resist the cruel tyranny of this thought, I hurried into the salon, heedless of any sounds I might make; but, luckily, I came upon a secret door leading to a little staircase. As I had expected, the key was in the lock; I slammed the door, went boldly out into the court, and gained the street in three bounds, without looking round to see whether I was observed.

‘A dramatist was to read a comedy at the countess’s house in two days’ time; I went thither, intending to outstay the others, so as to make a rather singular request to her; I meant to ask her to keep the following evening for me alone, and to deny herself to other comers; but when I found myself alone with her, my courage failed. Every tick of the clock alarmed me. It wanted only a quarter of an hour of midnight.

“‘If I do not speak,” I thought to myself, “I must smash my head against the corner of the mantel-piece.”

‘I gave myself three minutes’ grace; the three minutes went by, and I did not smash my head upon the marble; my heart grew heavy, like a sponge with water.

• “‘You are exceedingly amusing,” said she.

“Ah, madame, if you could but understand me!” I answered.

“What is the matter with you?” she asked. “You are turning pale.”

“I am hesitating to ask a favour of you.”

“Her gesture revived my courage. I asked her to make the appointment with me.

“Willingly,” she answered; “but why will you not speak to me now?”

“To be candid with you, I ought to explain the full scope of your promise: I want to spend this evening by your side, as if we were brother and sister. Have no fear; I am aware of your antipathies; you must have divined me sufficiently to feel sure that I should wish you to do nothing that could be displeasing to you; presumption, moreover, would not thus approach you. You have been a friend to me, you have shown me kindness and great indulgence; know, therefore, that to-morrow I must bid you farewell.—Do not take back your word,” I exclaimed, seeing her about to speak, and I went away.

‘At eight o’clock one evening towards the end of May, Fœdora and I were alone together in her gothic boudoir. I feared no longer; I was secure of happiness. My mistress should be mine, or I would seek a refuge in death. I had condemned my faint-hearted love, and a man who acknowledges his weakness is strong indeed.

‘The countess, in her blue cashmere gown, was reclining on a sofa, with her feet on a cushion. She wore an Oriental turban such as painters assign to early Hebrews; its strangeness added an indescribable coquettish grace to her attractions. A transitory charm, seemed to have laid its spell on her face; it might have furnished the argument that at every instant we become new and unparalleled beings, without any resemblance to the *us* of the future or of the past. I had never yet seen her so radiant.

“Do you know that you have piqued my curiosity?” she said, laughing.

“I will not disappoint it,” I said quietly, as I seated myself near to her and took the hand that she surrendered to me. “You have a very beautiful voice!”

“You have never heard me sing!” she exclaimed, starting involuntarily with surprise.

“I will prove that it is quite otherwise, whenever it is necessary. Is your delightful singing still to remain a mystery? Have no fear, I do not wish to penetrate it.”

‘We spent about an hour in familiar talk. While I adopted the attitude and manner of a man to whom Fœdora must refuse nothing, I showed her all a lover’s deference. Acting in this way, I received a favour—I was allowed to kiss her hand. She daintily drew off the glove; and my whole soul was dissolved and poured forth in that kiss. I was steeped in the bliss of an illusion in which I tried to believe.

‘Fœdora lent herself most unexpectedly to my caress and my flatteries. Do not accuse me of faintheartedness; if I had gone a step beyond these fraternal compliments, the claws would have been out of the sheath and into me. We remained perfectly silent for nearly ten minutes. I was admiring her, investing her with the charms she had not. She was mine just then, and mine only,—this enchanting being was mine, as was permissible, in my imagination; my longing wrapped her round and held her close; in my soul I wedded her. The countess was subdued and fascinated by my magnetic influence. Ever since I have regretted that this subjugation was not absolute; but just then I yearned for her soul, her heart alone, and for nothing else. I longed for an ideal and perfect happiness, a fair illusion that cannot last for very long. At last I spoke, feeling that the last hours of my frenzy were at hand.

“Hear me, madame. I love you, and you know it; I have said so a hundred times; you must have under-

stood me. I would not take upon me the airs of a coxcomb, nor would I flatter you, nor urge myself upon you like a fool; I would not owe your love to such arts as these; so I have been misunderstood. What sufferings have I not endured for your sake! For these, however, you were not to blame; but in a few minutes you shall decide for yourself. There are two kinds of poverty, madame. One kind openly walks the street in rags, an unconscious imitator of Diogenes, on a scanty diet, reducing life to its simplest terms; he is happier, maybe, than the rich; he has fewer cares at any rate, and accepts such portions of the world as stronger spirits refuse. Then there is poverty in splendour, a Spanish pauper, concealing the life of a beggar by his title, his bravery, and his pride; poverty that wears a white waistcoat and yellow kid gloves, a beggar with a carriage, whose whole career will be wrecked for lack of a half-penny. Poverty of the first kind belongs to the populace; the second kind is that of blacklegs, of kings, and of men of talent. I am neither a man of the people, nor a king, nor a swindler; possibly I have no talent either; I am an exception. With the name I bear I must die sooner than beg. Set your mind at rest, madame," I said; "to-day I have abundance, I possess sufficient of the clay for my needs"; for the hard look passed over her face which we wear whenever a well-dressed beggar takes us by surprise. "Do you remember the day when you wished to go to the Gymnase without me, never believing that I should be there?" I went on.

'She nodded.

"I had laid out my last five-franc piece that I might see you there.—Do you recollect our walk in the Jardin des Plantes? The hire of your cab took everything I had."

'I told her about my sacrifices, and described the life I led; heated not with wine, as I am to-day, but by the generous enthusiasm of my heart, my passion overflowed

in burning words; I have forgotten how the feelings within me blazed forth; neither memory nor skill of mine could possibly reproduce it. It was no colourless chronicle of blighted affections; my love was strengthened by fair hopes; and such words came to me, by love's inspiration, that each had power to set forth a whole life—like echoes of the cries of a soul in torment. In such tones the last prayers ascend from dying men on the battlefield. I stopped, for she was weeping. *Grand Dieu!* I had reaped an actor's reward, the success of a counterfeit passion displayed at the cost of five francs paid at the theatre door. I had drawn tears from her.

"If I had known——" she said.

"Do not finish the sentence," I broke in. "Even now I love you well enough to murder you——"

"She reached for the bell-pull. I burst into a roar of laughter.

"Do not call any one," I said. "I shall leave you to finish your life in peace. It would be a blundering kind of hatred that would murder you! You need not fear violence of any kind; I have spent a whole night at the foot of your bed without——"

"Monsieur——" she said, blushing; but after that first impulse of modesty that even the most hardened women must surely own, she flung a scornful glance at me, and said—

"You must have been very cold."

"Do you think that I set such value on your beauty, madame," I answered, guessing the thoughts that moved her. "Your beautiful face is for me a promise of a soul yet more beautiful. Madame, those to whom a woman is merely a woman can always purchase odalisques fit for the scraglio, and achieve their happiness at a small cost. But I aspired to something higher; I wanted the life of close communion of heart and heart with you that have no heart. I know that now. If you were to belong to another, I could kill him. And yet, no; for you would

love him, and his death might hurt you perhaps. What agony this is!" I cried.

"If it is any comfort to you," she retorted cheerfully, "I can assure you that I shall never belong to any one——"

"So you offer an affront to God Himself," I interrupted; "and you will be punished for it. Some day you will lie upon your sofa suffering unheard-of ills, unable to endure the light or the slightest sound, condemned to live as it were in the tomb. Then, when you seek the causes of those lingering and avenging torments, you will remember the woes that you distributed so lavishly upon your way. You have sown curses, and hatred will be your reward. We are the real judges, the executioners of a justice that reigns here below, which overrules the justice of man and the laws of God."

"No doubt it is very culpable in me not to love you," she said, laughing. "Am I to blame? No. I do not love you; you are a man, that is sufficient. I am happy by myself; why should I give up my way of living, a selfish way, if you will, for the caprices of a master? Marriage is a sacrament by virtue of which each imparts nothing but vexations to the other. Children, moreover, worry me. Did I not faithfully warn you about my nature? Why are you not satisfied to have my friendship? I wish I could make you amends for all the troubles I have caused you, through not guessing the value of your poor five-franc pieces. I appreciate the extent of your sacrifices; but your devotion and delicate tact can be repaid by love alone, and I care so little for you, that this scene has a disagreeable effect upon me."

"I am fully aware of my absurdity," I said, unable to restrain my tears. "Pardon me," I went on, "it was a delight to hear those cruel words you have just uttered, so well I love you. O, if I could testify my love with every drop of blood in me!"

"Men always repeat these classic formulas to us, more

or less effectively," she answered, still smiling. "But it appears very difficult to die at our feet, for I see corpses of that kind about everywhere. It is twelve o'clock. Allow me to go to bed."

"And in two hours' time you will cry to yourself, *Ah, mon Dieu!*"

"Like the day before yesterday! Yes," she said, "I was thinking of my stockbroker; I had forgotten to tell him to convert my five per cent. stock into the threes, and the three per cents. had fallen during the day."

"I looked at her, and my eyes glittered with anger. Sometimes a crime may be a whole romance; I understood that just then. She was so accustomed, no doubt, to the most impassioned declarations of this kind, that my words and my tears were forgotten already.

"Would you marry a peer of France?" I demanded abruptly.

"If he were a duke, I might."

"I seized my hat and made her a bow.

"Permit me to accompany you to the door," she said, cutting irony in her tones, in the poise of her head, and in her gesture.

"Madame——"

"Monsieur?"

"I shall never see you again."

"I hope not," and she insolently inclined her head.

"You wish to be a duchess?" I cried, excited by a sort of madness that her insolence roused in me. "You are wild for honours and titles? Well, only let me love you; bid my pen write and my voice speak for you alone; be the inmost soul of my life, my guiding star! Then, only accept me for your husband as a minister, a peer of France, a duke. I will make of myself whatever you would have me be!

"You made good use of the time you spent with the advocate," she said, smiling. "There is a fervency about your pleadings."

“The present is yours,” I cried, “but the future is mine! I only lose a woman; you are losing a name and a family. Time is big with my revenge; time will spoil your beauty, and yours will be a solitary death; and glory waits for me!”

“Thanks for your peroration!” she said, repressing a yawn; the wish that she might never see me again was expressed in her whole bearing.

That remark silenced me. I flung at her a glance full of hatred, and hurried away.

Fœdora must be forgotten; I must cure myself of my infatuation, and betake myself once more to my lonely studies, or die. So I set myself tremendous tasks; I determined to complete my labours. For fifteen days I never left my garret, spending whole nights in pallid thought. I worked with difficulty, and by fits and starts, despite my courage and the stimulation of despair. The muse had fled. I could not exorcise the brilliant mocking image of Fœdora. Something morbid brooded over every thought, a vague longing as dreadful as remorse. I imitated the anchorites of the Thebaid. If I did not pray as they did, I lived a life in the desert like theirs, hewing out my ideas as they were wont to hew their rocks. I could at need have girdled my waist with spikes, that physical suffering might quell mental anguish.

One evening Pauline found her way into my room.

“You are killing yourself,” she said, imploringly; “you should go out and see your friends——”

“Pauline, you were a true prophet; Fœdora is killing me, I want to die. My life is intolerable.”

“Is there only one woman in the world?” she asked, smiling. “Why make yourself so miserable in so short a life?”

I looked at Pauline in bewilderment. She left me before I noticed her departure; the sound of her words had reached me, but not their sense. Very soon I had to take my *Memoirs* in manuscript to my literary contractor.

I was so absorbed by my passion, that I could not remember how I had managed to live without money; I only knew that the four hundred and fifty francs due to me would pay my debts. So I went to receive my salary, and met Rastignac, who thought me changed and thinner.

“What hospital have you been discharged from?” he asked.

“That woman is killing me,” I answered; “I can neither despise her nor forget her.”

“You had much better kill her, then perhaps you would think no more of her,” he said, laughing.

“I have often thought of it,” I replied; “but though sometimes the thought of a crime revives my spirits, of violence and murder, either or both, I am really incapable of carrying out the design. The countess is an admirable monster who would crave for pardon, and not every man is an Othello.”

“She is like every woman who is beyond our reach,” Rastignac interrupted.

“I am mad,” I cried; “I can feel the madness raging at times in my brain. My ideas are like shadows; they flit before me, and I cannot grasp them. Death would be preferable to this life, and I have carefully considered the best way of putting an end to the struggle. I am not thinking of the living Fœdora in the Faubourg Saint Honoré, but of my Fœdora here,” and I tapped my forehead. “What do you say to opium?”

“Pshaw! horrid agonies,” said Rastignac.

“Or charcoal fumes?”

“A low dodge.”

“Or the Seine?”

“The drag-nets, and the Morgue too, are filthy.”

“A pistol-shot?”

“And if you miscalculate, you disfigure yourself for life. Listen to me,” he went on, “like all young men, I have pondered over suicide. Which of us hasn’t killed himself two or three times before he is thirty? I find

there is no better course than to use existence as a means of pleasure. Go in for thorough dissipation, and your passion or you will perish in it. Intemperance, my dear fellow, commands all forms of death. Does she not wield the thunderbolt of apoplexy? Apoplexy is a pistol-shot that does not miscalculate. Orgies are lavish in all physical pleasures; is not that the small change for opium? And the riot that makes us drink to excess bears a challenge to mortal combat with wine. That butt of Malmsey of the Duke of Clarence's must have had a pleasanter flavour than Seine mud. When we sink gloriously under the table, is not that a periodical death by drowning on a small scale? If we are picked up by the police and stretched out on those chilly benches of theirs at the police-station, do we not enjoy all the pleasures of the Morgue. For though we are not blue and green, muddy and swollen corpses, on the other hand we have the consciousness of the climax.

"Ah," he went on, "this protracted suicide has nothing in common with a bankrupt grocer's demise. Tradespeople have brought the river into disrepute; they fling themselves in to soften their creditors' hearts. In your place I should endeavour to die gracefully; and if you wish to invent a novel way of doing it, by struggling with life after this manner, I will be your second. I am disappointed and sick of everything. The Alsacienne, whom it was proposed that I should marry, had six toes on her left foot; I cannot possibly live with a woman who has six toes! It would get about to a certainty, and then I should be ridiculous. Her income was only eighteen thousand francs; her fortune diminished in quantity as her toes increased. The devil take it; if we begin an outrageous sort of life, we may come on some bit of luck, perhaps!"

'Rastignac's eloquence carried me away. The attractions of the plan shone too temptingly, hopes were kindled, the poetical aspects of the matter appealed to a poet.'

‘How about money?’ I said.

‘‘Haven’t you four hundred and fifty francs?’’

‘‘Yes, but debts to my landlady and the tailor——’’

‘‘You would pay your tailor? You will never be anything whatever, not so much as a minister.’’

‘‘But what can one do with twenty louis?’’

‘‘Go to the gaming-table.’’

‘I shuddered.

‘‘You are going to launch out into what I call systematic dissipation,’’ said he, noticing my scruples, ‘‘and yet you are afraid of a green table-cloth.’’

‘‘Listen to me,’’ I answered. ‘‘I promised my father never to set foot in a gaming-house. Not only is that a sacred promise, but I still feel an unconquerable disgust whenever I pass a gambling-hell; take the money and go without me. While our fortune is at stake, I will set my own affairs straight, and then I will go to your lodgings and wait for you.’’

‘That was the way I went to perdition. A young man has only to come across a woman who will not love him, or a woman who loves him too well, and his whole life becomes a chaos. Prosperity swallows up our energy just as adversity obscures our virtues. Back once more in my Hôtel de Saint-Quentin, I gazed about me a long while in the garret where I had led my scholar’s temperate life, a life which would perhaps have been a long and honourable one, and that I ought not to have quitted for the fevered existence which had urged me to the brink of a precipice. Pauline surprised me in this dejected attitude.

‘‘Why, what is the matter with you?’’ she asked.

‘I rose and quietly counted out the money owing to her mother, and added to it sufficient to pay for six months’ rent in advance. She watched me in some alarm.

‘‘I am going to leave you, dear Pauline.’’

‘‘I knew it!’’ she exclaimed.

“Listen, my child. I have not given up the idea of coming back. Keep my room for me for six months. If I do not return by the fifteenth of November, you will come into possession of my things. This sealed packet of manuscript is the fair copy of my great work on ‘The Will,’” I went on, pointing to a package. “Will you deposit it in the King’s Library? And you may do as you wish with everything that is left here.”

‘Her look weighed heavily on my heart; Pauline was an embodiment of conscience there before me.

“I shall have no more lessons,” she said, pointing to the piano.

‘I did not answer that.

“Will you write to me?”

“Good-bye, Pauline.”

‘I gently drew her towards me, and set a kiss on that innocent fair brow of hers, like snow that has not yet touched the earth—a father’s or a brother’s kiss. She fled. I would not see Madame Gaudin, hung my key in its wonted place, and departed. I was almost at the end of the Rue de Cluny when I heard a woman’s light footstep behind me.

“I have embroidered this purse for you,” Pauline said; “will you refuse even that?”

‘By the light of the street lamp I thought I saw tears in Pauline’s eyes, and I groaned. Moved perhaps by a common impulse, we parted in haste like people who fear the contagion of the plague.

‘As I waited with dignified calmness for Rastignac’s return, his room seemed a grotesque interpretation of the sort of life I was about to enter upon. The clock on the chimney-piece was surmounted by a Venus resting on her tortoise; a half-smoked cigar lay in her arms. Costly furniture of various kinds—love-tokens, very likely—was scattered about. Old shoes lay on a luxurious sofa. The comfortable armchair into which I had thrown myself bore as many scars as a veteran; the arms were

gashed, the back was overlaid with a thick, stale deposit of pomade and hair-oil from the heads of all his visitors. Splendour and squalor were oddly mingled, on the walls, the bed, and everywhere else. You might have thought of a Neapolitan palace and the groups of *lazzaroni* about it. It was the room of a gambler or a *mauvais sujet*, where the luxury exists merely for one individual, who leads the life of the senses and does not trouble himself over inconsistencies.

‘There was a certain imaginative element about the picture it presented. Life was suddenly revealed there in its rags and spangles as the incomplete thing it really is, of course, but so vividly and picturesquely; it was like a den where a brigand has heaped up all the plunder in which he delights. Some pages were missing from a copy of Byron’s poems: they had gone to light a fire of a few sticks for this young person, who played for stakes of a thousand francs, and had not a faggot; who kept a tilbury, and had not a whole shirt to his back. Any day a countess or an actress or a run of luck at *écarté* might set him up with an outfit worthy of a king. A candle had been stuck into the green bronze sheath of a vesta-holder; a woman’s portrait lay yonder, torn out of its carved gold setting. How was it possible that a young man, whose nature craved excitement, could renounce a life so attractive by reason of its contradictions; a life that afforded all the delights of war in the midst of peace? I was growing drowsy when Rastignac kicked the door open and shouted—

“Victory! Now we can take our time about dying.”

‘He held out his hat filled with gold to me, and put it down on the table; then we pranced round it like a pair of cannibals about to eat a victim; we stamped, and danced, and yelled, and sang; we gave each other blows fit to kill an elephant, at sight of all the pleasures of the world contained in that hat.

‘“Twenty-seven thousand francs,” said Rastignac,

adding a few bank-notes to the pile of gold. "That would be enough for other folk to live upon; will it be sufficient for us to die on? Yes! we will breathe our last in a bath of gold—hurrah!" and we capered afresh.

"We divided the windfall. We began with double-napoleons, and came down to the smaller coins, one by one. "This for you, this for me," we kept on saying, distilling our joy drop by drop.

"We won't go to sleep," cried Rastignac. "Joseph! some punch!"

"He threw gold to his faithful attendant.

"There is your share," he said; "go and bury yourself if you can."

"Next day I went to Lesage and chose my furniture, took the rooms that you know in the Rue Taitbout, and left the decoration to one of the best upholsterers. I bought horses. I plunged into a vortex of pleasures, at once hollow and real. I went in for play, gaining and losing enormous sums, but only at friends' houses and in ball-rooms; never in gaming-houses, for which I still retained the holy horror of my early days. Without meaning it, I made some friends, either through quarrels or owing to the easy confidence established among those who are going to the bad together; nothing, possibly, makes us cling to one another so tightly as our evil propensities.

"I made several ventures in literature, which were flatteringly received. Great men who followed the profession of letters, having nothing to fear from me, belauded me, not so much on account of my merits as to cast a slur on those of their rivals.

"I became a "free-liver," to make use of the picturesque expression appropriated by the language of excess. I made it a point of honour not to be long about dying, and that my zeal and prowess should eclipse those displayed by all others in the jolliest company. I was always spruce and carefully dressed. I had some reputation for cleverness. There was no sign about me of that fearful

way of living which makes a man into a mere digesting apparatus, a funnel, a pampered beast.

‘Very soon Debauch rose before me in all the majesty of its horror, and I grasped all that it meant. Those prudent, steady-going characters who are laying down wine in bottles for their heirs, can barely conceive, it is true, of so wide a theory of life, nor appreciate its normal condition; but when will you instil poetry into the provincial intellect? Opium and tea, with all their delights, are merely drugs to folk of that calibre.

‘Is not the imperfect sybarite to be met with even in Paris itself, that intellectual metropolis? Unfit to endure the fatigues of pleasure, this sort of person, after a drinking bout, is very much like those worthy bourgeois who fall foul of music after hearing a new opera by Rossini. Does he not renounce these courses in the same frame of mind that leads an abstemious man to forswear Ruffec patés, because the first one, forsooth, gave him the indigestion?

‘Debauch is as surely an art as poetry, and is not for craven spirits. To penetrate its mysteries and appreciate its charms, conscientious application is required; and as with every path of knowledge, the way is thorny and forbidding at the outset. The great pleasures of humanity are hedged about with formidable obstacles; not its single enjoyments, but enjoyment as a system, a system which establishes seldom experienced sensations and makes them habitual, which concentrates and multiplies them for us, creating a dramatic life within our life, and imperatively demanding a prompt and enormous expenditure of vitality. War, Power, Art, like Debauch, are all forms of demoralisation, equally remote from the faculties of humanity, equally profound, and all are alike difficult of access. But when man has once stormed the heights of these grand mysteries, does he not walk in another world? Are not generals, ministers, and artists carried, more or less, towards destruction by the need of violent

distractions in an existence so remote from ordinary life as theirs?

'War, after all, is the Excess of bloodshed, as the Excess of self-interest produces Politics. Excesses of every sort are brothers. These social enormities possess the attraction of the abyss; they draw us towards themselves as St. Helena beckoned Napoleon; we are fascinated, our heads swim, we wish to sound their depths though we cannot account for the wish. Perhaps the thought of Infinity dwells in these precipices, perhaps they contain some colossal flattery for the soul of man; for is he not, then, wholly absorbed in himself?

'The wearied artist needs a complete contrast to his paradise of imaginings and of studious hours; he either craves, like God, the seventh day of rest, or with Satan, the pleasures of hell; so that his senses may have free play in opposition to the employment of his faculties. Byron could never have taken for his relaxation to the independent gentleman's delights of boston and gossip, for he was a poet, and so must needs pit Greece against Mahmoud.

'In war, is not man an angel of extirpation, a sort of executioner on a gigantic scale? Must not the spell be strong indeed that makes us undergo such horrid sufferings so hostile to our weak frames, sufferings that encircle every strong passion with a hedge of thorns? The tobacco smoker is seized with convulsions, and goes through a kind of agony consequent upon his excesses; but has he not borne a part in delightful festivals in realms unknown? Has Europe ever ceased from wars? She has never given herself time to wipe the stains from her feet that are steeped in blood to the ankle. Mankind at large is carried away by fits of intoxication, as nature has its accessions of love.

'For men in private life, for a vegetating Mirabeau dreaming of storms in a time of calm, Excess comprises all things; it perpetually embraces the whole sum of life;

it is something better still—it is a duel with an antagonist of unknown power, a monster, terrible at first sight, that must be seized by the horns, a labour that cannot be imagined.

‘Suppose that nature has endowed you with a feeble stomach or one of limited capacity ; you acquire a mastery over it and improve it ; you learn to carry your liquor ; you grow accustomed to being drunk ; you pass whole nights without sleep ; at last you acquire the constitution of a colonel of cuirassiers ; and in this way you create yourself afresh, as if to fly in the face of Providence.

‘A man transformed after this sort is like a neophyte who has at last become a veteran, has accustomed his mind to shot and shell and his legs to lengthy marches. When the monster’s hold on him is still uncertain, and it is not yet known which will have the better of it, they roll over and over, alternately victor and vanquished, in a world where everything is wonderful, where every ache of the soul is laid to sleep, where only the shadows of ideas are revived.

‘This furious struggle has already become a necessity for us. The prodigal has struck a bargain for all the enjoyments with which life teems abundantly, at the price of his own death, like the mythical persons in legends who sold themselves to the devil for the power of doing evil. For them, instead of flowing quietly on in its monotonous course in the depths of some counting-house or study, life is poured out in a boiling torrent.

‘Excess is, in short, for the body what the mystic’s ecstasy is for the soul. Intoxication steepes you in fantastic imaginings every whit as strange as those of ecstasies. You know hours as full of rapture as a young girl’s dreams ; you travel without fatigue ; you chat pleasantly with your friends ; words come to you with a whole life in each, and fresh pleasures without regrets ; poems are set forth for you in a few brief phrases. The

coarse animal satisfaction, in which science has tried to find a soul, is followed by the enchanted drowsiness that men sigh for under the burden of consciousness. Is it not because they all feel the need of absolute repose? Because Excess is a sort of toll that genius pays to pain?

Look at all great men; nature made them pleasure-loving or base, every one. Some mocking or jealous power corrupted them in either soul or body, so as to make all their powers futile, and their efforts of no avail.

'All men and all things appear before you in the guise you choose, in those hours when wine has sway. You are lord of all creation; you transform it at your pleasure. And throughout this unceasing delirium, Play may pour, at your will, its molten lead into your veins.

'Some day you will fall into the monster's power. Then you will have, as I had, a frenzied awakening, with impotence sitting by your pillow. Are you an old soldier? Phthisis attacks you. A diplomatist? An aneurism hangs death in your heart by a thread. It will perhaps be consumption that will cry to me, "Let us be going!" as to Raphael of Urbino, in old time, killed by an excess of love.

'In this way I have existed. I was launched into the world too early or too late. My energy would have been dangerous there, no doubt, if I had not squandered it in such ways as these. Was not the world rid of an Alexander, by the cup of Hercules, at the close of a drinking bout.

'There are some, the sport of Destiny, who must either have heaven or hell, the hospice of St. Bernard or riotous excess. Only just now I lacked the heart to moralise about those two,' and he pointed to Euphrasia and Aquilina. 'They are types of my own personal history, images of my life! I could scarcely reproach them; they stood before me like judges.

'In the midst of this drama that I was enacting, and while my distracting disorder was at its height, two crises

supervened; each brought me keen and abundant pangs. The first came a few days after I had flung myself, like Sardanapalus, on my pyre. I met Fœdora under the peristyle of the Bouffons. We both were waiting for our carriages.

“Ah! so you are living yet?”

‘That was the meaning of her smile, and probably of the spiteful words she murmured in the ear of her *cicisbeo*, telling him my history no doubt, rating mine as a common love affair. She was deceived, yet she was applauding her perspicacity. Oh, that I should be dying for her, must still adore her, always see her through my potations, see her still when I was overcome with wine, or in the arms of courtesans; and know that I was a target for her scornful jests! Oh, that I should be unable to tear the love of her out of my breast and to fling it at her feet!

‘Well, I quickly exhausted my funds, but owing to those three years of discipline, I enjoyed the most robust health, and on the day that I found myself without a penny I felt remarkably well. In order to carry on the process of dying, I signed bills at short dates, and the day came when they must be met. Painful excitements! but how they quicken the pulses of youth! I was not prematurely aged; I was young yet, and full of vigour and life.

‘At my first debt all my virtues came to life; slowly and despairingly they seemed to pace towards me; but I could compound with them—they were like aged aunts that begin with a scolding and end by bestowing tears and money upon you.

‘Imagination was less yielding; I saw my name bandied about through every city in Europe. “One’s name is oneself,” says Eusèbe Salverte. After these excursions I returned to the room I had never quitted, like a *doppelgänger* in a German tale, and came to myself with a start.

‘I used to see with indifference a banker’s messenger going on his errands through the streets of Paris, like a commercial Nemesis, wearing his master’s livery—a grey

coat and a silver badge ; but now I hated the species in advance. One of them came one morning to ask me to meet some eleven bills that I had scrawled my name upon. My signature was worth three thousand francs ! Taking me altogether, I myself was not worth that amount. Sheriff's deputies rose up before me, turning their callous faces upon my despair, as the hangman regards the criminal to whom he says, "It has just struck half-past three." I was in the power of their clerks ; they could scribble my name, drag it through the mire, and jeer at it. I was a defaulter. Has a debtor any right to himself ? Could not other men call me to account for my way of living ? Why had I eaten puddings *à la chipolata* ? Why had I iced my wine ? Why had I slept, or walked, or thought, or amused myself when I had not paid them ?

'At any moment, in the middle of a poem, during some train of thought, or while I was gaily breakfasting in the pleasant company of my friends, I might look to see a gentleman enter in a coat of chestnut-brown, with a shabby hat in his hand. This gentleman's appearance would signify my debt, the bill I had drawn ; the spectre would compel me to leave the table to speak to him, blight my spirits, despoil me of my cheerfulness, of my mistress, of all I possessed, down to my very bedstead.

'Remorse itself is more easily endured. Remorse does not drive us into the street nor into the prison of Sainte-Pélagie ; it does not force us into the detestable sink of vice. Remorse only brings us to the scaffold, where the executioner invests us with a certain dignity ; as we pay the extreme penalty, everybody believes in our innocence ; but people will not credit a penniless prodigal with a single virtue.

'My debts had other incarnations. There is the kind that goes about on two feet, in a green cloth coat, and blue spectacles, carrying umbrellas of various hues ; you come face to face with him at the corner of some street, in the midst of your mirth. These have the detestable

prerogative of saying, "M. de Valentin owes me something, and does not pay. I have a hold on him. He had better not show me any offensive airs!" You must bow to your creditors, and moreover bow politely. "When are you going to pay me?" say they. And you must lie, and beg money of another man, and cringe to a fool seated on his strong-box, and receive sour looks in return from these horse-leeches; a blow would be less hateful; you must put up with their crass ignorance and calculating morality. A debt is a feat of the imaginative that they cannot appreciate. A borrower is often carried away and overmastered by generous impulses; nothing great, nothing magnanimous can move or dominate those who live for money, and recognise nothing but money. I myself held money in abhorrence.

'Or a bill may undergo a final transformation into some meritorious old man with a family dependent upon him. My creditor might be a living picture for Greuze, a paralytic with his children round him, a soldier's widow, holding out beseeching hands to me. Terrible creditors are these with whom we are forced to sympathise, and when their claims are satisfied we owe them a further debt of assistance.

'The night before the bills fell due, I lay down with the false calm of those who sleep before their approaching execution, or with a duel in prospect, rocked as they are by delusive hopes. But when I woke, when I was cool and collected, when I found myself imprisoned in a banker's portfolio, and floundering in statements covered with red ink—then my debts sprang up everywhere, like grasshoppers, before my eyes. There were my debts, my clock, my armchairs; my debts were inlaid in the very furniture which I liked best to use. These gentle inanimate slaves were to fall a prey to the harpies of the Châtelet, were to be carried off by the broker's men, and brutally thrown on the market. Ah, my property was a part of myself!

‘The sound of the door-bell rang through my heart ; while it seemed to strike at me, where kings should be struck at—in the head. Mine was a martyrdom, without heaven for its reward. For a magnanimous nature, debt is a hell, and a hell, moreover, with sheriff’s officers and brokers in it. An undischarged debt is something mean and sordid ; it is a beginning of knavery ; it is something worse, it is a lie ; it prepares the way for crime, and brings together the planks for the scaffold. My bills were protested. Three days afterwards I met them, and this is how it happened.

‘A speculator came, offering to buy the island in the Loire belonging to me, where my mother lay buried. I closed with him. When I went to his solicitor to sign the deeds, I felt a cavern-like chill in the dark office that made me shudder ; it was the same cold dampness that had laid hold upon me at the brink of my father’s grave. I looked upon this as an evil omen. I seemed to see the shade of my mother, and to hear her voice. What power was it that made my own name ring vaguely in my ears, in spite of the clamour of bells ?

‘The money paid down for my island, when all my debts were discharged, left me in possession of two thousand francs. I could now have returned to a scholar’s tranquil life, it is true ; I could have gone back to my garret after having gained an experience of life, with my head filled with the results of extensive observation, and with a certain sort of reputation attaching to me. But *Fœdora’s* hold upon her victim was not relaxed. We often met. I compelled her admirers to sound my name in her ears, by dint of astonishing them with my cleverness and success, with my horses and equipages. It all found her impassive and uninterested ; so did an ugly phrase of *Rastignac’s*, “He is killing himself for you.”

‘I charged the world at large with my revenge, but I was not happy. While I was fathoming the miry depths of life, I only recognised the more keenly at all times the

happiness of reciprocal affection ; it was a shadow that I followed through all that befell me in my extravagance, and in my wildest moments. It was my misfortune to be deceived in my fairest beliefs, to be punished by ingratitude for benefiting others, and to receive uncounted pleasures as the reward of my errors—a sinister doctrine, but a true one for the prodigal !

‘The contagious leprosy of Fœdora’s vanity had taken hold of me at last. I probed my soul, and found it cankered and rotten. I bore the marks of the devil’s claw upon my forehead. It was impossible to me thenceforward to do without the incessant agitation of a life fraught with danger at every moment, or to dispense with the execrable refinements of luxury. If I had possessed millions, I should still have gambled, revelled, and racketed about. I wished never to be alone with myself, and I must have false friends and courtesans, wine and good cheer to distract me. The ties that attach a man to family life had been permanently broken for me. I had become a galley-slave of pleasure, and must accomplish my destiny of suicide. During the last days of my prosperity, I spent every night in the most incredible excesses ; but every morning death cast me back upon life again. I would have taken a conflagration with as little concern as any man with a life annuity. However, I at last found myself alone with a twenty-franc piece ; I bethought me then of Rastignac’s luck——

‘Eh, eh !——’ Raphael exclaimed, interrupting himself, as he remembered the talisman and drew it from his pocket. Perhaps he was wearied by the long day’s strain, and had no more strength left wherewith to pilot his head through the seas of wine and punch ; or perhaps, exasperated by this symbol of his own existence, the torrent of his own eloquence gradually overwhelmed him. Raphael became excited and elated and like one completely deprived of reason.

‘The devil take death !’ he shouted, brandishing the

skin ; 'I mean to live ! I am rich, I have every virtue ; nothing will withstand me. Who would not be generous, when everything is in his power ? Aha ! Aha ! I wished for two hundred thousand livres a year, and I shall have them. Bow down before me, all of you, wallowing on the carpets like swine in the mire ! You all belong to me—a precious property truly ! I am rich ; I could buy you all, even the deputy snoring over there. Scum of society, give me your benediction ! I am the Pope.'

Raphael's vociferations had been hitherto drowned by a thorough-bass of snores, but now they became suddenly audible. Most of the sleepers started up with a cry, saw the cause of the disturbance on his feet, tottering uncertainly, and cursed him in concert for a drunken brawler.

'Silence !' shouted Raphael. 'Back to your kennels, you dogs ! Emile, I have riches, I will give you Havannah cigars !'

'I am listening,' the poet replied. 'Death or Fœdora ! On with you ! That silky Fœdora deceived you. Women are all daughters of Eve. There is nothing dramatic about that rigmarole of yours.'

'Ah, but you were sleeping, slyboots.'

'No—"Death or Fœdora !"—I have it !'

'Wake up !' Raphael shouted, beating Emile with the piece of shagreen as if he meant to draw electric fluid out of it.

'*Tonnerre !*' said Emile, springing up and flinging his arms round Raphael ; 'my friend, remember the sort of women you are with.'

'I am a millionaire !'

'If you are not a millionaire, you are most certainly drunk.'

'Drunk with power. I can kill you !—Silence ! I am Nero ! I am Nebuchadnezzar !'

'But, Raphael, we are in queer company, and you ought to keep quiet for the sake of your own dignity.'

‘My life has been silent too long. I mean to have my revenge now on the world at large. I will not amuse myself by squandering paltry five-franc pieces; I will reproduce and sum up my epoch by absorbing human lives, human minds, and human souls. There are the treasures of pestilence—that is no paltry kind of wealth, is it? I will wrestle with fevers—yellow, blue, or green—with whole armies, with gibbets. I can possess Fœdora—Yet no, I do not want Fœdora; she is a disease; I am dying of Fœdora. I want to forget Fœdora.’

‘If you keep on calling out like this, I shall take you into the dining-room.’

‘Do you see this skin? It is Solomon’s will. Solomon belongs to me—a little varlet of a king! Arabia is mine, Arabia Petræa to boot; and the universe, and you too, if I choose. If I choose—Ah! be careful. I can buy up all your journalist’s shop; you shall be my valet. You shall be my valet, you shall manage my newspaper. Valet! *valet*, that is to say, free from aches and pains, because he has no brains.’

At the word, Emile carried Raphael off into the dining-room.

‘All right,’ he remarked; ‘yes, my friend, I am your valet. But you are about to be editor-in-chief of a newspaper; so be quiet, and behave properly, for my sake. Iave you no regard for me?’

‘Regard for you! You shall have Havannah cigars, with this bit of shagreen: always with this skin, this supreme bit of shagreen. It is a cure for corns, an efficacious remedy. Do you suffer? I will remove hem.’

‘Never have I known you so senseless——’

‘Senseless, my friend? Not at all. This skin contracts whenever I form a wish—’tis a paradox. There is a Brahmin underneath it! The Brahmin must be a droll fellow, for our desires, look you, are bound to expand——’

‘Yes, yes——’

'I tell you——'

'Yes, yes, very true, I am quite of your opinion—o desires expand——'

'The skin, I tell you.'

'Yes.'

'You don't believe me. I know you, my friend; y are as full of lies as a new-made king.'

'How can you expect me to follow your drunk maunderings?'

'I will bet you I can prove it. Let us measu it——'

'Goodness! he will never get off to sleep,' exclaim Emile, as he watched Raphael rummaging busily in t dining-room.

Thanks to the peculiar clearness with which external objects are sometimes projected on an inebriated brain sharp contrast to its own obscure imaginings, Vale found an inkstand and a table-napkin, with the quick n of a monkey, repeating all the time—

'Let us measure it! Let us measure it!'

'All right,' said Emile; 'let us measure it.'

The two friends spread out the table-napkin and la the Wild Ass's Skin upon it. As Emile's hand appeared to be steadier than Raphael's, he drew a line with pen and ink round the talisman, while his friend said—

'I wished for an income of two hundred thousand livres, didn't I? Well, when that comes, you will observe a mighty diminution of my chagrin.'

'Yes—now go to sleep. Shall I make you comfortable on that sofa? Now then, are you all right?'

'Yes, my nursling of the press. You shall amuse me you shall drive the flies away from it. The friend adversity should be the friend of prosperity. So I w give you some Havan—nah—cig——'

'Come, now, sleep. Sleep off your gold, you m lionaire!'

'You! sleep off your paragraphs! Good-night! E

