

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

EVE AND DAVID

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Eve and David

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Honoré de Balzac

Eve and David

EVE AND DAVID

Lucien had gone to Paris; and David Sechard, with the courage and intelligence of the ox which painters give the Evangelist for accompanying symbol, set himself to make the large fortune for which he had wished that evening down by the Charente, when he sat with Eve by the weir, and she gave him her hand and her heart. He wanted to make the money quickly, and less for himself than for Eve's sake and Lucien's. He would place his wife amid the elegant and comfortable surroundings that were hers by right, and his strong arm should sustain her brother's ambitions – this was the programme that he saw before his eyes in letters of fire.

Journalism and politics, the immense development of the book trade, of literature and of the sciences; the increase of public interest in matters touching the various industries in the country; in fact, the whole social tendency of the epoch following the establishment of the Restoration produced an enormous increase in the demand for paper. The supply required was almost ten times as large as the quantity in which the celebrated Ouvrard speculated at the outset of the Revolution. Then Ouvrard could buy up first the entire stock of paper and then the manufacturers; but in the year 1821 there were so many paper-mills in France, that no one could hope to repeat his success; and David had neither audacity enough nor capital enough for such speculation. Machinery for producing paper in any length was just coming into use in England. It was one of the most urgent needs of the time, therefore, that the paper trade should keep pace with the requirements of the French system of civil government, a system by which the right of discussion was to be extended to every man, and the whole fabric based upon continual expression of individual opinion; a grave misfortune, for the nation that deliberates is but little wont to act.

So, strange coincidence! while Lucien was drawn into the great machinery of journalism, where he was like to leave his honor and his intelligence torn to shreds, David Sechard, at the back of his printing-house, foresaw all the practical consequences of the increased activity of the periodical press. He saw the direction in which the spirit of the age was tending, and sought to find means to the required end. He saw also that there was a fortune awaiting the discoverer of cheap paper, and the event has justified his clear-sightedness. Within the last fifteen years, the Patent Office has received more than a hundred applications from persons claiming to have discovered cheap substances to be employed in the manufacture of paper. David felt more than ever convinced that this would be no brilliant triumph, it is true, but a useful and immensely profitable discovery; and after his brother-in-law went to Paris, he became more and more absorbed in the problem which he had set himself to solve.

The expenses of his marriage and of Lucien's journey to Paris had exhausted all his resources; he confronted the extreme of poverty at the very outset of married life. He had kept one thousand francs for the working expenses of the business, and owed a like sum, for which he had given a bill to Postel the druggist. So here was a double problem for this deep thinker; he must invent a method of making cheap paper, and that quickly; he must make the discovery, in fact, in order to apply the proceeds to the needs of the household and of the business. What words can describe the brain that can forget the cruel preoccupations caused by hidden want, by the daily needs of a family and the daily drudgery of a printer's business, which requires such minute, painstaking care; and soar, with the enthusiasm and intoxication of the man of science, into the regions of the unknown in quest of a secret which daily eludes the most subtle experiment? And the inventor, alas! as will shortly be seen, has plenty of woes to endure, besides the ingratitude of the many; idle folk that can do

nothing themselves tell them, "Such a one is a born inventor; he could not do otherwise. He no more deserves credit for his invention than a prince for being born to rule! He is simply exercising his natural faculties, and his work is its own reward," and the people believe them.

Marriage brings profound mental and physical perturbations into a girl's life; and if she marries under the ordinary conditions of lower middle-class life, she must moreover begin to study totally new interests and initiate herself in the intricacies of business. With marriage, therefore, she enters upon a phase of her existence when she is necessarily on the watch before she can act. Unfortunately, David's love for his wife retarded this training; he dared not tell her the real state of affairs on the day after their wedding, nor for some time afterwards. His father's avarice condemned him to the most grinding poverty, but he could not bring himself to spoil the honeymoon by beginning his wife's commercial education and prosaic apprenticeship to his laborious craft. So it came to pass that housekeeping, no less than working expenses, ate up the thousand francs, his whole fortune. For four months David gave no thought to the future, and his wife remained in ignorance. The awakening was terrible! Postel's bill fell due; there was no money to meet it, and Eve knew enough of the debt and its cause to give up her bridal trinkets and silver.

That evening Eve tried to induce David to talk of their affairs, for she had noticed that he was giving less attention to the business and more to the problem of which he had once spoken to her. Since the first few weeks of married life, in fact, David spent most of his time in the shed in the backyard, in the little room where he was wont to mould his ink-rollers. Three months after his return to Angouleme, he had replaced the old fashioned round ink-balls by rollers made of strong glue and treacle, and an ink-table, on which the ink was evenly distributed, an improvement so obvious that Cointet Brothers no sooner saw it than they adopted the plan themselves.

By the partition wall of this kitchen, as it were, David had set up a little furnace with a copper pan, ostensibly to save the cost of fuel over the recasting of his rollers, though the moulds had not been used twice, and hung there rusting upon the wall. Nor was this all; a solid oak door had been put in by his orders, and the walls were lined with sheet-iron; he even replaced the dirty window sash by panes of ribbed glass, so that no one without could watch him at his work.

When Eve began to speak about the future, he looked uneasily at her, and cut her short at the first word by saying, "I know all that you must think, child, when you see that the workshop is left to itself, and that I am dead, as it were, to all business interests; but see," he continued, bringing her to the window, and pointing to the mysterious shed, "there lies our fortune. For some months yet we must endure our lot, but let us bear it patiently; leave me to solve the problem of which I told you, and all our troubles will be at an end."

David was so good, his devotion was so thoroughly to be taken upon his word, that the poor wife, with a wife's anxiety as to daily expenses, determined to spare her husband the household cares and to take the burden upon herself. So she came down from the pretty blue-and-white room, where she sewed and talked contentedly with her mother, took possession of one of the two dens at the back of the printing-room, and set herself to learn the business routine of typography. Was it not heroism in a wife who expected ere long to be a mother?

During the past few months David's workmen had left him one by one; there was not enough work for them to do. Cointet Brothers, on the other hand, were overwhelmed with orders; they were employing all the workmen of the department; the alluring prospect of high wages even brought them a few from Bordeaux, more especially apprentices, who thought themselves sufficiently expert to cancel their articles and go elsewhere. When Eve came to look into the affairs of Sechard's printing works, she discovered that he employed three persons in all.

First in order stood Cerizet, an apprentice of Didot's, whom David had chosen to train. Most foremen have some one favorite among the great numbers of workers under them, and David had brought Cerizet to Angouleme, where he had been learning more of the business. Marion, as much attached to the house as a watch-dog, was the second; and the third was Kolb, an Alsacien, at one time

a porter in the employ of the Messrs. Didot. Kolb had been drawn for military service, chance brought him to Angouleme, and David recognized the man's face at a review just as his time was about to expire. Kolb came to see David, and was smitten forthwith by the charms of the portly Marion; she possessed all the qualities which a man of his class looks for in a wife – the robust health that bronzes the cheeks, the strength of a man (Marion could lift a form of type with ease), the scrupulous honesty on which an Alsacien sets such store, the faithful service which bespeaks a sterling character, and finally, the thrift which had saved a little sum of a thousand francs, besides a stock of clothing and linen, neat and clean, as country linen can be. Marion herself, a big, stout woman of thirty-six, felt sufficiently flattered by the admiration of a cuirassier, who stood five feet seven in his stockings, a well-built warrior, strong as a bastion, and not unnaturally suggested that he should become a printer. So, by the time Kolb received his full discharge, Marion and David between them had transformed him into a tolerably creditable “bear,” though their pupil could neither read nor write.

Job printing, as it is called, was not so abundant at this season but that Cerizet could manage it without help. Cerizet, compositor, clicker, and foreman, realized in his person the “phenomenal triplicity” of Kant; he set up type, read proof, took orders, and made out invoices; but the most part of the time he had nothing to do, and used to read novels in his den at the back of the workshop while he waited for an order for a bill-head or a trade circular. Marion, trained by old Sechard, prepared and wetted down the paper, helped Kolb with the printing, hung the sheets to dry, and cut them to size; yet cooked the dinner, none the less, and did her marketing very early of a morning.

Eve told Cerizet to draw out a balance-sheet for the last six months, and found that the gross receipts amounted to eight hundred francs. On the other hand, wages at the rate of three francs per day – two francs to Cerizet, and one to Kolb – reached a total of six hundred francs; and as the goods supplied for the work printed and delivered amounted to some hundred odd francs, it was clear to Eve that David had been carrying on business at a loss during the first half-year of their married life. There was nothing to show for rent, nothing for Marion's wages, nor for the interest on capital represented by the plant, the license, and the ink; nothing, finally, by way of allowance for the host of things included in the technical expression “wear and tear,” a word which owes its origin to the cloths and silks which are used to moderate the force of the impression, and to save wear to the type; a square of stuff (the *blanket*) being placed between the platen and the sheet of paper in the press.

Eve made a rough calculation of the resources of the printing office and of the output, and saw how little hope there was for a business drained dry by the all-devouring activity of the brothers Cointet; for by this time the Cointets were not only contract printers to the town and the prefecture, and printers to the Diocese by special appointment – they were paper-makers and proprietors of a newspaper to boot. That newspaper, sold two years ago by the Sechards, father and son, for twenty-two thousand francs, was now bringing in eighteen thousand francs per annum. Eve began to understand the motives lurking beneath the apparent generosity of the brothers Cointet; they were leaving the Sechard establishment just sufficient work to gain a pittance, but not enough to establish a rival house.

When Eve took the management of the business, she began by taking stock. She set Kolb and Marion and Cerizet to work, and the workshop was put to rights, cleaned out, and set in order. Then one evening when David came in from a country excursion, followed by an old woman with a huge bundle tied up in a cloth, Eve asked counsel of him as to the best way of turning to profit the odds and ends left them by old Sechard, promising that she herself would look after the business. Acting upon her husband's advice, Mme. Sechard sorted all the remnants of paper which she found, and printed old popular legends in double columns upon a single sheet, such as peasants paste on their walls, the histories of *The Wandering Jew*, *Robert the Devil*, *La Belle Maguelonne* and sundry miracles. Eve sent Kolb out as a hawker.

Cerizet had not a moment to spare now; he was composing the naive pages, with the rough cuts that adorned them, from morning to night; Marion was able to manage the taking off; and all domestic cares fell to Mme. Chardon, for Eve was busy coloring the prints. Thanks to Kolb's activity

and honesty, Eve sold three thousand broad sheets at a penny apiece, and made three hundred francs in all at a cost of thirty francs.

But when every peasant's hut and every little wine-shop for twenty leagues round was papered with these legends, a fresh speculation must be discovered; the Alsacien could not go beyond the limits of the department. Eve, turning over everything in the whole printing house, had found a collection of figures for printing a "Shepherd's Calendar," a kind of almanac meant for those who cannot read, letterpress being replaced by symbols, signs, and pictures in colored inks, red, black and blue. Old Sechard, who could neither read nor write himself, had made a good deal of money at one time by bringing out an almanac in hieroglyph. It was in book form, a single sheet folded to make one hundred and twenty-eight pages.

Thoroughly satisfied with the success of the broad sheets, a piece of business only undertaken by country printing offices, Mme. Sechard invested all the proceeds in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, and began it upon a large scale. Millions of copies of this work are sold annually in France. It is printed upon even coarser paper than the *Almanac of Liege*, a ream (five hundred sheets) costing in the first instance about four francs; while the printed sheets sell at the rate of a halfpenny apiece – twenty-five francs per ream.

Mme. Sechard determined to use one hundred reams for the first impression; fifty thousand copies would bring in two thousand francs. A man so deeply absorbed in his work as David in his researches is seldom observant; yet David, taking a look round his workshop, was astonished to hear the groaning of a press and to see Cerizet always on his feet, setting up type under Mme. Sechard's direction. There was a pretty triumph for Eve on the day when David came in to see what she was doing, and praised the idea, and thought the calendar an excellent stroke of business. Furthermore, David promised to give advice in the matter of colored inks, for an almanac meant to appeal to the eye; and finally, he resolved to recast the ink-rollers himself in his mysterious workshop, so as to help his wife as far as he could in her important little enterprise.

But just as the work began with strenuous industry, there came letters from Lucien in Paris, heart-sinking letters that told his mother and sister and brother-in-law of his failure and distress; and when Eve, Mme. Chardon, and David each secretly sent money to their poet, it must be plain to the reader that the three hundred francs they sent were like their very blood. The overwhelming news, the disheartening sense that work as bravely as she might, she made so little, left Eve looking forward with a certain dread to an event which fills the cup of happiness to the full. The time was coming very near now, and to herself she said, "If my dear David has not reached the end of his researches before my confinement, what will become of us? And who will look after our poor printing office and the business that is growing up?"

The *Shepherd's Calendar* ought by rights to have been ready before the 1st of January, but Cerizet was working unaccountably slowly; all the work of composing fell to him; and Mme. Sechard, knowing so little, could not find fault, and was fain to content herself with watching the young Parisian.

Cerizet came from the great Foundling Hospital in Paris. He had been apprenticed to the MM. Didot, and between the ages of fourteen and seventeen he was David Sechard's fanatical worshiper. David put him under one of the cleverest workmen, and took him for his copy-holder, his page. Cerizet's intelligence naturally interested David; he won the lad's affection by procuring amusements now and again for him, and comforts from which he was cut off by poverty. Nature had endowed Cerizet with an insignificant, rather pretty little countenance, red hair, and a pair of dull blue eyes; he had come to Angouleme and brought the manners of the Parisian street-boy with him. He was formidable by reason of a quick, sarcastic turn and a spiteful disposition. Perhaps David looked less strictly after him in Angouleme; or, perhaps, as the lad grew older, his mentor put more trust in him, or in the sobering influences of a country town; but be that as it may, Cerizet (all unknown to his sponsor) was going completely to the bad, and the printer's apprentice was acting the part of a Don

Juan among little work girls. His morality, learned in Paris drinking-saloons, laid down the law of self-interest as the sole rule of guidance; he knew, moreover, that next year he would be “drawn for a soldier,” to use the popular expression, saw that he had no prospects, and ran into debt, thinking that soon he should be in the army, and none of his creditors would run after him. David still possessed some ascendancy over the young fellow, due not to his position as master, nor yet to the interest that he had taken in his pupil, but to the great intellectual power which the sometime street-boy fully recognized.

Before long Cerizet began to fraternize with the Cointets’ workpeople, drawn to them by the mutual attraction of blouse and jacket, and the class feeling, which is, perhaps, strongest of all in the lowest ranks of society. In their company Cerizet forgot the little good doctrine which David had managed to instil into him; but, nevertheless, when the others joked the boy about the presses in his workshop (“old sabots,” as the “bears” contemptuously called them), and showed him the magnificent machines, twelve in number, now at work in the Cointets’ great printing office, where the single wooden press was only used for experiments, Cerizet would stand up for David and fling out at the braggarts.

“My gaffer will go farther with his ‘sabots’ than yours with their cast-iron contrivances that turn out mass books all day long,” he would boast. “He is trying to find out a secret that will lick all the printing offices in France and Navarre.”

“And meantime you take your orders from a washer-woman, you snip of a foreman, on two francs a day.”

“She is pretty though,” retorted Cerizet; “it is better to have her to look at than the phizes of your gaffers.”

“And do you live by looking at his wife?”

From the region of the wineshop, or from the door of the printing office, where these bickerings took place, a dim light began to break in upon the brothers Cointet as to the real state of things in the Sechard establishment. They came to hear of Eve’s experiment, and held it expedient to stop these flights at once, lest the business should begin to prosper under the poor young wife’s management.

“Let us give her a rap over the knuckles, and disgust her with the business,” said the brothers Cointet.

One of the pair, the practical printer, spoke to Cerizet, and asked him to do the proof-reading for them by piecework, to relieve their reader, who had more than he could manage. So it came to pass that Cerizet earned more by a few hours’ work of an evening for the brothers Cointet than by a whole day’s work for David Sechard. Other transactions followed; the Cointets seeing no small aptitude in Cerizet, he was told that it was a pity that he should be in a position so little favorable to his interests.

“You might be foreman some day in a big printing office, making six francs a day,” said one of the Cointets one day, “and with your intelligence you might come to have a share in the business.”

“Where is the use of my being a good foreman?” returned Cerizet. “I am an orphan, I shall be drawn for the army next year, and if I get a bad number who is there to pay some one else to take my place?”

“If you make yourself useful,” said the well-to-do printer, “why should not somebody advance the money?”

“It won’t be my gaffer in any case!” said Cerizet.

“Pooh! Perhaps by that time he will have found out the secret.”

The words were spoken in a way that could not but rouse the worst thoughts in the listener; and Cerizet gave the papermaker and printer a very searching look.

“I do not know what he is busy about,” he began prudently, as the master said nothing, “but he is not the kind of man to look for capitals in the lower case!”

“Look here, my friend,” said the printer, taking up half-a-dozen sheets of the diocesan prayer-book and holding them out to Cerizet, “if you can correct these for us by to-morrow, you shall have

eighteen francs to-morrow for them. We are not shabby here; we put our competitor's foreman in the way of making money. As a matter of fact, we might let Mme. Sechard go too far to draw back with her *Shepherd's Calendar*, and ruin her; very well, we give you permission to tell her that we are bringing out a *Shepherd's Calendar* of our own, and to call her attention too to the fact that she will not be the first in the field."

Cerizet's motive for working so slowly on the composition of the almanac should be clear enough by this time.

When Eve heard that the Cointets meant to spoil her poor little speculation, dread seized upon her; at first she tried to see a proof of attachment in Cerizet's hypocritical warning of competition; but before long she saw signs of an over-keen curiosity in her sole compositor – the curiosity of youth, she tried to think.

"Cerizet," she said one morning, "you stand about on the threshold, and wait for M. Sechard in the passage, to pry into his private affairs; when he comes out into the yard to melt down the rollers, you are there looking at him, instead of getting on with the almanac. These things are not right, especially when you see that I, his wife, respect his secrets, and take so much trouble on myself to leave him free to give himself up to his work. If you had not wasted time, the almanac would be finished by now, and Kolb would be selling it, and the Cointets could have done us no harm."

"Eh! madame," answered Cerizet. "Here am I doing five francs' worth of composing for two francs a day, and don't you think that that is enough? Why, if I did not read proofs of an evening for the Cointets, I might feed myself on husks."

"You are turning ungrateful early," said Eve, deeply hurt, not so much by Cerizet's grumbling as by his coarse tone, threatening attitude, and aggressive stare; "you will get on in life."

"Not with a woman to order me about though, for it is not often that the month has thirty days in it then."

Feeling wounded in her womanly dignity, Eve gave Cerizet a withering look and went upstairs again. At dinner-time she spoke to David.

"Are you sure, dear, of that little rogue Cerizet?"

"Cerizet!" said David. "Why, he was my youngster; I trained him, I took him on as my copy-holder. I put him to composing; anything that he is he owes to me, in fact! You might as well ask a father if he is sure of his child."

Upon this, Eve told her husband that Cerizet was reading proofs for the Cointets.

"Poor fellow! he must live," said David, humbled by the consciousness that he had not done his duty as a master.

"Yes, but there is a difference, dear, between Kolb and Cerizet – Kolb tramps about twenty leagues every day, spends fifteen or twenty sous, and brings us back seven and eight and sometimes nine francs of sales; and when his expenses are paid, he never asks for more than his wages. Kolb would sooner cut off his hand than work a lever for the Cointets; Kolb would not peer among the things that you throw out into the yard if people offered him a thousand crowns to do it; but Cerizet picks them up and looks at them."

It is hard for noble natures to think evil, to believe in ingratitude; only through rough experience do they learn the extent of human corruption; and even when there is nothing left them to learn in this kind, they rise to an indulgence which is the last degree of contempt.

"Pooh! pure Paris street-boy's curiosity," cried David.

"Very well, dear, do me the pleasure to step downstairs and look at the work done by this boy of yours, and tell me then whether he ought not to have finished our almanac this month."

David went into the workshop after dinner, and saw that the calendar should have been set up in a week. Then, when he heard that the Cointets were bringing out a similar almanac, he came to the rescue. He took command of the printing office, Kolb helped at home instead of selling broadsheets. Kolb and Marion pulled off the impressions from one form while David worked another press with

Cerizet, and superintended the printing in various inks. Every sheet must be printed four separate times, for which reason none but small houses will attempt to produce a *Shepherd's Calendar*, and that only in the country where labor is cheap, and the amount of capital employed in the business is so small that the interest amounts to little. Wherefore, a press which turns out beautiful work cannot compete in the printing of such sheets, coarse though they may be.

So, for the first time since old Sechard retired, two presses were at work in the old house. The calendar was, in its way, a masterpiece; but Eve was obliged to sell it for less than a halfpenny, for the Cointets were supplying hawkers at the rate of three centimes per copy. Eve made no loss on the copies sold to hawkers; on Kolb's sales, made directly, she gained; but her little speculation was spoiled. Cerizet saw that his fair employer distrusted him; in his own conscience he posed as the accuser, and said to himself, "You suspect me, do you? I will have my revenge," for the Paris street-boy is made on this wise. Cerizet accordingly took pay out of all proportion to the work of proof-reading done for the Cointets, going to their office every evening for the sheets, and returning them in the morning. He came to be on familiar terms with them through the daily chat, and at length saw a chance of escaping the military service, a bait held out to him by the brothers. So far from requiring prompting from the Cointets, he was the first to propose the espionage and exploitation of David's researches.

Eve saw how little she could depend upon Cerizet, and to find another Kolb was simply impossible; she made up her mind to dismiss her one compositor, for the insight of a woman who loves told her that Cerizet was a traitor; but as this meant a deathblow to the business, she took a man's resolution. She wrote to M. Metivier, with whom David and the Cointets and almost every papermaker in the department had business relations, and asked him to put the following advertisement into a trade paper:

"FOR SALE, as a going concern, a Printing Office, with License and Plant; situated at Angouleme. Apply for particulars to M. Metivier, Rue Serpente."

The Cointets saw the advertisement. "That little woman has a head on her shoulders," they said. "It is time that we took her business under our own control, by giving her enough work to live upon; we might find a real competitor in David's successor; it is in our interest to keep an eye upon that workshop."

The Cointets went to speak to David Sechard, moved thereto by this thought. Eve saw them, knew that her stratagem had succeeded at once, and felt a thrill of the keenest joy. They stated their proposal. They had more work than they could undertake, their presses could not keep pace with the work, would M. Sechard print for them? They had sent to Bordeaux for workmen, and could find enough to give full employment to David's three presses.

"Gentlemen," said Eve, while Cerizet went across to David's workshop to announce the two printers, "while my husband was with the MM. Didot he came to know of excellent workers, honest and industrious men; he will choose his successor, no doubt, from among the best of them. If he sold his business outright for some twenty thousand francs, it might bring us in a thousand francs per annum; that would be better than losing a thousand yearly over such trade as you leave us. Why did you envy us the poor little almanac speculation, especially as we have always brought it out?"

"Oh, why did you not give us notice, madame? We would not have interfered with you," one of the brothers answered blandly (he was known as the "tall Cointet").

"Oh, come gentlemen! you only began your almanac after Cerizet told you that I was bringing out mine."

She spoke briskly, looking full at "the tall Cointet" as she spoke. He lowered his eyes; Cerizet's treachery was proven to her.

This brother managed the business and the paper-mill; he was by far the cleverer man of business of the two. Jean showed no small ability in the conduct of the printing establishment, but in intellectual capacity he might be said to take colonel's rank, while Boniface was a general. Jean left the

command to Boniface. This latter was thin and spare in person; his face, sallow as an altar candle, was mottled with reddish patches; his lips were pinched; there was something in his eyes that reminded you of a cat's eyes. Boniface Cointet never excited himself; he would listen to the grossest insults with the serenity of a bigot, and reply in a smooth voice. He went to mass, he went to confession, he took the sacrament. Beneath his caressing manners, beneath an almost spiritless look, lurked the tenacity and ambition of the priest, and the greed of the man of business consumed with a thirst for riches and honors. In the year 1820 "tall Cointet" wanted all that the *bourgeoisie* finally obtained by the Revolution of 1830. In his heart he hated the aristocrats, and in religion he was indifferent; he was as much or as little of a bigot as Bonaparte was a member of the Mountain; yet his vertebral column bent with a flexibility wonderful to behold before the noblesse and the official hierarchy; for the powers that be, he humbled himself, he was meek and obsequious. One final characteristic will describe him for those who are accustomed to dealings with all kinds of men, and can appreciate its value – Cointet concealed the expression of his eyes by wearing colored glasses, ostensibly to preserve his sight from the reflection of the sunlight on the white buildings in the streets; for Angouleme, being set upon a hill, is exposed to the full glare of the sun. Tall Cointet was really scarcely above middle height; he looked much taller than he actually was by reason of the thinness, which told of overwork and a brain in continual ferment. His lank, sleek gray hair, cut in somewhat ecclesiastical fashion; the black trousers, black stockings, black waistcoat, and long puce-colored greatcoat (styled a *levite* in the south), all completed his resemblance to a Jesuit.

Boniface was called "tall Cointet" to distinguish him from his brother, "fat Cointet," and the nicknames expressed a difference in character as well as a physical difference between a pair of equally redoubtable personages. As for Jean Cointet, a jolly, stout fellow, with a face from a Flemish interior, colored by the southern sun of Angouleme, thick-set, short and paunchy as Sancho Panza; with a smile on his lips and a pair of sturdy shoulders, he was a striking contrast to his older brother. Nor was the difference only physical and intellectual. Jean might almost be called Liberal in politics; he belonged to the Left Centre, only went to mass on Sundays, and lived on a remarkably good understanding with the Liberal men of business. There were those in L'Houmeau who said that this divergence between the brothers was more apparent than real. Tall Cointet turned his brother's seeming good nature to advantage very skilfully. Jean was his bludgeon. It was Jean who gave all the hard words; it was Jean who conducted the executions which little beseemed the elder brother's benevolence. Jean took the storms department; he would fly into a rage, and propose terms that nobody would think of accepting, to pave the way for his brother's less unreasonable propositions. And by such policy the pair attained their ends, sooner or later.

Eve, with a woman's tact, had soon divined the characters of the two brothers; she was on her guard with foes so formidable. David, informed beforehand of everything by his wife, lent a profoundly inattentive mind to his enemies' proposals.

"Come to an understanding with my wife," he said, as he left the Cointets in the office and went back to his laboratory. "Mme. Sechard knows more about the business than I do myself. I am interested in something that will pay better than this poor place; I hope to find a way to retrieve the losses that I have made through you –"

"And how?" asked the fat Cointet, chuckling.

Eve gave her husband a look that meant, "Be careful!"

"You will be my tributaries," said David, "and all other consumers of papers besides."

"Then what are you investigating?" asked the hypocritical Boniface Cointet.

Boniface's question slipped out smoothly and insinuatingly, and again Eve's eyes implored her husband to give an answer that was no answer, or to say nothing at all.

"I am trying to produce paper at fifty per cent less than the present cost price," and he went. He did not see the glances exchanged between the brothers. "That is an inventor, a man of his build

cannot sit with his hands before him. – Let us exploit him,” said Boniface’s eyes. “How can we do it?” said Jean’s.

Mme. Sechard spoke. “David treats me just in the same way,” she said. “If I show any curiosity, he feels suspicious of my name, no doubt, and out comes that remark of his; it is only a formula, after all.”

“If your husband can work out the formula, he will certainly make a fortune more quickly than by printing; I am not surprised that he leaves the business to itself,” said Boniface, looking across the empty workshop, where Kolb, seated upon a wetting-board, was rubbing his bread with a clove of garlic; “but it would not suit our views to see this place in the hands of an energetic, pushing, ambitious competitor,” he continued, “and perhaps it might be possible to arrive at an understanding. Suppose, for instance, that you consented for a consideration to allow us to put in one of our own men to work your presses for our benefit, but nominally for you; the thing is sometimes done in Paris. We would find the fellow work enough to enable him to rent your place and pay you well, and yet make a profit for himself.”

“It depends on the amount,” said Eve Sechard. “What is your offer?” she added, looking at Boniface to let him see that she understood his scheme perfectly well.

“What is your own idea?” Jean Cointet put in briskly.

“Three thousand francs for six months,” said she.

“Why, my dear young lady, you were proposing to sell the place outright for twenty thousand francs,” said Boniface with much suavity. “The interest on twenty thousand francs is only twelve hundred francs per annum at six per cent.”

For a moment Eve was thrown into confusion; she saw the need for discretion in matters of business.

“You wish to use our presses and our name as well,” she said; “and, as I have already shown you, I can still do a little business. And then we pay rent to M. Sechard senior, who does not load us with presents.”

After two hours of debate, Eve obtained two thousand francs for six months, one thousand to be paid in advance. When everything was concluded, the brothers informed her that they meant to put in Cerizet as lessee of the premises. In spite of herself, Eve started with surprise.

“Isn’t it better to have somebody who knows the workshop?” asked the fat Cointet.

Eve made no reply; she took leave of the brothers, vowing inwardly to look after Cerizet.

“Well, here are our enemies in the place!” laughed David, when Eve brought out the papers for his signature at dinner-time.

“Pshaw!” said she, “I will answer for Kolb and Marion; they alone would look after things. Besides, we shall be making an income of four thousand francs from the workshop, which only costs us money as it is; and looking forward, I see a year in which you may realize your hopes.”

“You were born to be the wife of a scientific worker, as you said by the weir,” said David, grasping her hand tenderly.

But though the Sechard household had money sufficient that winter, they were none the less subjected to Cerizet’s espionage, and all unconsciously became dependent upon Boniface Cointet.

“We have them now!” the manager of the paper-mill had exclaimed as he left the house with his brother the printer. “They will begin to regard the rent as regular income; they will count upon it and run themselves into debt. In six months’ time we will decline to renew the agreement, and then we shall see what this man of genius has at the bottom of his mind; we will offer to help him out of his difficulty by taking him into partnership and exploiting his discovery.”

Any shrewd man of business who should have seen tall Cointet’s face as he uttered those words, “taking him into partnership,” would have known that it behooves a man to be even more careful in the selection of the partner whom he takes before the Tribunal of Commerce than in the choice of the wife whom he weds at the Mayor’s office. Was it not enough already, and more than enough, that

the ruthless hunters were on the track of the quarry? How should David and his wife, with Kolb and Marion to help them, escape the toils of a Boniface Cointet?

A draft for five hundred francs came from Lucien, and this, with Cerizet's second payment, enabled them to meet all the expenses of Mme. Sechard's confinement. Eve and the mother and David had thought that Lucien had forgotten them, and rejoiced over this token of remembrance as they rejoiced over his success, for his first exploits in journalism made even more noise in Angouleme than in Paris.

But David, thus lulled into a false security, was to receive a staggering blow, a cruel letter from Lucien: —

Lucien to David

“MY DEAR DAVID, — I have drawn three bills on you, and negotiated them with Metivier; they fall due in one, two, and three months' time. I took this hateful course, which I know will burden you heavily, because the one alternative was suicide. I will explain my necessity some time, and I will try besides to send the amounts as the bills fall due.

“Burn this letter; say nothing to my mother and sister; for, I confess it, I have counted upon you, upon the heroism known so well to your despairing brother,
“*LUCIEN DE RUBEMPRE.*”

By this time Eve had recovered from her confinement.

“Your brother, poor fellow, is in desperate straits,” David told her. “I have sent him three bills for a thousand francs at one, two, and three months; just make a note of them,” and he went out into the fields to escape his wife's questionings.

But Eve had felt very uneasy already. It was six months since Lucien had written to them. She talked over the news with her mother till her forebodings grew so dark that she made up her mind to dissipate them. She would take a bold step in her despair.

Young M. de Rastignac had come to spend a few days with his family. He had spoken of Lucien in terms that set Paris gossip circulating in Angouleme, till at last it reached the journalist's mother and sister. Eve went to Mme. de Rastignac, asked the favor of an interview with her son, spoke of all her fears, and asked him for the truth. In a moment Eve heard of her brother's connection with the actress Coralie, of his duel with Michel Chrestien, arising out of his own treacherous behavior to Daniel d'Arthez; she received, in short, a version of Lucien's history, colored by the personal feeling of a clever and envious dandy. Rastignac expressed sincere admiration for the abilities so terribly compromised, and a patriotic fear for the future of a native genius; spite and jealousy masqueraded as pity and friendliness. He spoke of Lucien's blunders. It seemed that Lucien had forfeited the favor of a very great person, and that a patent conferring the right to bear the name and arms of Rubempre had actually been made out and subsequently torn up.

“If your brother, madame, had been well advised, he would have been on the way to honors, and Mme. de Bargeton's husband by this time; but what can you expect? He deserted her and insulted her. She is now Mme. la Comtesse Sixte du Chatelet, to her own great regret, for she loved Lucien.”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Mme. Sechard.

“Your brother is like a young eagle, blinded by the first rays of glory and luxury. When an eagle falls, who can tell how far he may sink before he drops to the bottom of some precipice? The fall of a great man is always proportionately great.”

Eve came away with a great dread in her heart; those last words pierced her like an arrow. She had been wounded to the quick. She said not a word to anybody, but again and again a tear rolled down her cheeks, and fell upon the child at her breast. So hard is it to give up illusions sanctioned by family

feeling, illusions that have grown with our growth, that Eve had doubted Eugene de Rastignac. She would rather hear a true friend's account of her brother. Lucien had given them d'Arthez's address in the days when he was full of enthusiasm for the brotherhood; she wrote a pathetic letter to d'Arthez, and received the following reply: —

D'Arthez to Mme. Sechard

“MADAME, — You ask me to tell you the truth about the life that your brother is leading in Paris; you are anxious for enlightenment as to his prospects; and to encourage a frank answer on my part, you repeat certain things that M. de Rastignac has told you, asking me if they are true. With regard to the purely personal matter, madame, M. de Rastignac's confidences must be corrected in Lucien's favor. Your brother wrote a criticism of my book, and brought it to me in remorse, telling me that he could not bring himself to publish it, although obedience to the orders of his party might endanger one who was very dear to him. Alas! madame, a man of letters must needs comprehend all passions, since it is his pride to express them; I understood that where a mistress and a friend are involved, the friend is inevitably sacrificed. I smoothed your brother's way; I corrected his murderous article myself, and gave it my full approval.

“You ask whether Lucien has kept my friendship and esteem; to this it is difficult to make an answer. Your brother is on a road that leads him to ruin. At this moment I still feel sorry for him; before long I shall have forgotten him, of set purpose, not so much on account of what he has done already as for that which he inevitably will do. Your Lucien is not a poet, he has the poetic temper; he dreams, he does not think; he spends himself in emotion, he does not create. He is, in fact — permit me to say it — a womanish creature that loves to shine, the Frenchman's great failing. Lucien will always sacrifice his best friend for the pleasure of displaying his own wit. He would not hesitate to sign a pact with the Devil to-morrow if so he might secure a few years of luxurious and glorious life. Nay, has he not done worse already? He has bartered his future for the short-lived delights of living openly with an actress. So far, he has not seen the dangers of his position; the girl's youth and beauty and devotion (for she worships him) have closed his eyes to the truth; he cannot see that no glory or success or fortune can induce the world to accept the position. Very well, as it is now, so it will be with each new temptation — your brother will not look beyond the enjoyment of the moment. Do not be alarmed: Lucien will never go so far as a crime, he has not the strength of character; but he would take the fruits of a crime, he would share the benefit but not the risk — a thing that seems abhorrent to the whole world, even to scoundrels. Oh, he would despise himself, he would repent; but bring him once more to the test, and he would fail again; for he is weak of will, he cannot resist the allurements of pleasure, nor forego the least of his ambitions. He is indolent, like all who would fain be poets; he thinks it clever to juggle with the difficulties of life instead of facing and overcoming them. He will be brave at one time, cowardly at another, and deserves neither credit for his courage, nor blame for his cowardice. Lucien is like a harp with strings that are slackened or tightened by the atmosphere. He might write a great book in a glad or angry mood, and care nothing for the success that he had desired for so long.

“When he first came to Paris he fell under the influence of an unprincipled young fellow, and was dazzled by his companion's adroitness and experience in the

difficulties of a literary life. This juggler completely bewitched Lucien; he dragged him into a life which a man cannot lead and respect himself, and, unluckily for Lucien, love shed its magic over the path. The admiration that is given too readily is a sign of want of judgment; a poet ought not to be paid in the same coin as a dancer on the tight-rope. We all felt hurt when intrigue and literary rascality were preferred to the courage and honor of those who counseled Lucien rather to face the battle than to filch success, to spring down into the arena rather than become a trumpet in the orchestra.

“Society, madame, oddly enough, shows plentiful indulgence to young men of Lucien’s stamp; they are popular, the world is fascinated by their external gifts and good looks. Nothing is asked of them, all their sins are forgiven; they are treated like perfect natures, others are blind to their defects, they are the world’s spoiled children. And, on the other hand, the world is stern beyond measure to strong and complete natures. Perhaps in this apparently flagrant injustice society acts sublimely, taking a harlequin at his just worth, asking nothing of him but amusement, promptly forgetting him; and asking divine great deeds of those before whom she bends the knee. Everything is judged by laws of its being; the diamond must be flawless; the ephemeral creation of fashion may be flimsy, bizarre, inconsequent. So Lucien may perhaps succeed to admiration in spite of his mistakes; he has only to profit by some happy vein or to be among good companions; but if an evil angel crosses his path, he will go to the very depths of hell. ‘Tis a brilliant assemblage of good qualities embroidered upon too slight a tissue; time wears the flowers away till nothing but the web is left; and if that is poor stuff, you behold a rag at the last. So long as Lucien is young, people will like him; but where will he be as a man of thirty? That is the question which those who love him sincerely are bound to ask themselves. If I alone had come to think in this way of Lucien, I might perhaps have spared you the pain which my plain speaking will give you; but to evade the questions put by your anxiety, and to answer a cry of anguish like your letter with commonplaces, seemed to me alike unworthy of you and of me, whom you esteem too highly; and besides, those of my friends who knew Lucien are unanimous in their judgment. So it appeared to me to be a duty to put the truth before you, terrible though it may be. Anything may be expected of Lucien, anything good or evil. That is our opinion, and this letter is summed up in that sentence. If the vicissitudes of his present way of life (a very wretched and slippery one) should bring the poet back to you, use all your influence to keep him among you; for until his character has acquired stability, Paris will not be safe for him. He used to speak of you, you and your husband, as his guardian angels; he has forgotten you, no doubt; but he will remember you again when tossed by tempest, with no refuge left to him but his home. Keep your heart for him, madame; he will need it.

“Permit me, madame, to convey to you the expression of the sincere respect of a man to whom your rare qualities are known, a man who honors your mother’s fears so much, that he desires to style himself your devoted servant,
“D’ARTHEZ.””

Two days after the letter came, Eve was obliged to find a wet-nurse; her milk had dried up. She had made a god of her brother; now, in her eyes, he was depraved through the exercise of his noblest faculties; he was wallowing in the mire. She, noble creature that she was, was incapable of swerving from honesty and scrupulous delicacy, from all the pious traditions of the hearth, which still burns so clearly and sheds its light abroad in quiet country homes. Then David had been right in his forecasts! The leaden hues of grief overspread Eve’s white brow. She told her husband her secret in one of

the pellucid talks in which married lovers tell everything to each other. The tones of David's voice brought comfort. Though the tears stood in his eyes when he knew that grief had dried his wife's fair breast, and knew Eve's despair that she could not fulfil a mother's duties, he held out reassuring hopes.

"Your brother's imagination has let him astray, you see, child. It is so natural that a poet should wish for blue and purple robes, and hurry as eagerly after festivals as he does. It is a bird that loves glitter and luxury with such simple sincerity, that God forgives him if man condemns him for it."

"But he is draining our lives!" exclaimed poor Eve.

"He is draining our lives just now, but only a few months ago he saved us by sending us the first fruits of his earnings," said the good David. He had the sense to see that his wife was in despair, was going beyond the limit, and that love for Lucien would very soon come back. "Fifty years ago, or thereabouts, Mercier said in his *Tableau de Paris* that a man cannot live by literature, poetry, letters, or science, by the creatures of his brain, in short; and Lucien, poet that he is, would not believe the experience of five centuries. The harvests that are watered with ink are only reaped ten or twelve years after the sowing, if indeed there is any harvest after all. Lucien has taken the green wheat for the sheaves. He will have learned something of life, at any rate. He was the dupe of a woman at the outset; he was sure to be duped afterwards by the world and false friends. He has bought his experience dear, that is all. Our ancestors used to say, 'If the son of the house brings back his two ears and his honor safe, all is well –'"

"Honor!" poor Eve broke in. "Oh, but Lucien has fallen in so many ways! Writing against his conscience! Attacking his best friend! Living upon an actress! Showing himself in public with her. Bringing us to lie on straw –"

"Oh, that is nothing –!" cried David, and suddenly stopped short. The secret of Lucien's forgery had nearly escaped him, and, unluckily, his start left a vague, uneasy impression on Eve.

"What do you mean by nothing?" she answered. "And where shall we find the money to meet bills for three thousand francs?"

"We shall be obliged to renew the lease with Cerizet, to begin with," said David. "The Cointets have been allowing him fifteen per cent on the work done for them, and in that way alone he has made six hundred francs, besides contriving to make five hundred francs by job printing."

"If the Cointets know that, perhaps they will not renew the lease. They will be afraid of him, for Cerizet is a dangerous man."

"Eh! what is that to me!" cried David, "we shall be rich in a very little while. When Lucien is rich, dear angel, he will have nothing but good qualities."

"Oh! David, my dear, my dear; what is this that you have said unthinkingly? Then Lucien fallen into the clutches of poverty would not have the force of character to resist evil? And you think just as M. d'Arthez thinks! No one is great unless he has strength of character, and Lucien is weak. An angel must not be tempted – what is that?"

"What but a nature that is noble only in its own region, its own sphere, its heaven? I will spare him the struggle; Lucien is not meant for it. Look here! I am so near the end now that I can talk to you about the means."

He drew several sheets of white paper from his pocket, brandished them in triumph, and laid them on his wife's lap.

"A ream of this paper, royal size, would cost five francs at the most," he added, while Eve handled the specimens with almost childish surprise.

"Why, how did you make these sample bits?" she asked.

"With an old kitchen sieve of Marion's."

"And are you not satisfied yet?" asked Eve.

"The problem does not lie in the manufacturing process; it is a question of the first cost of the pulp. Alas, child, I am only a late comer in a difficult path. As long ago as 1794, Mme. Masson tried to use printed paper a second time; she succeeded, but what a price it cost! The Marquis of

Salisbury tried to use straw as a material in 1800, and the same idea occurred to Seguin in France in 1801. Those sheets in your hand are made from the common rush, the *arundo phragmites*, but I shall try nettles and thistles; for if the material is to continue to be cheap, one must look for something that will grow in marshes and waste lands where nothing else can be grown. The whole secret lies in the preparation of the stems. At present my method is not quite simple enough. Still, in spite of this difficulty, I feel sure that I can give the French paper trade the privilege of our literature; papermaking will be for France what coal and iron and coarse potter's clay are for England – a monopoly. I mean to be the Jacquart of the trade.”

Eve rose to her feet. David's simple-mindedness had roused her to enthusiasm, to admiration; she held out her arms to him and held him tightly to her, while she laid her head upon his shoulder.

“You give me my reward as if I had succeeded already,” he said.

For all answer, Eve held up her sweet face, wet with tears, to his, and for a moment she could not speak.

“The kiss was not for the man of genius,” she said, “but for my comforter. Here is a rising glory for the glory that has set; and, in the midst of my grief for the brother that has fallen so low, my husband's greatness is revealed to me. – Yes, you will be great, great like the Graindorges, the Rouvets, and Van Robais, and the Persian who discovered madder, like all the men you have told me about; great men whom nobody remembers, because their good deeds were obscure industrial triumphs.”

“What are they doing just now?”

It was Boniface Cointet who spoke. He was walking up and down outside in the Place du Murier with Cerizet watching the silhouettes of the husband and wife on the blinds. He always came at midnight for a chat with Cerizet, for the latter played the spy upon his former master's every movement.

“He is showing her the paper he made this morning, no doubt,” said Cerizet.

“What is it made of?” asked the paper manufacturer.

“Impossible to guess,” answered Cerizet; “I made a hole in the roof and scrambled up and watched the gaffer; he was boiling pulp in a copper pan all last night. There was a heap of stuff in a corner, but I could make nothing of it; it looked like a heap of tow, as near as I could make out.”

“Go no farther,” said Boniface Cointet in unctuous tones; “it would not be right. Mme. Sechard will offer to renew your lease; tell her that you are thinking of setting up for yourself. Offer her half the value of the plant and license, and, if she takes the bid, come to me. In any case, spin the matter out... Have they no money?”

“Not a sou,” said Cerizet.

“Not a sou,” repeated tall Cointet. – “I have them now,” said he to himself.

Metivier, paper manufacturers' wholesale agent, and Cointet Brothers, printers and paper manufacturers, were also bankers in all but name. This surreptitious banking system defies all the ingenuity of the Inland Revenue Department. Every banker is required to take out a license which, in Paris, costs five hundred francs; but no hitherto devised method of controlling commerce can detect the delinquents, or compel them to pay their due to the Government. And though Metivier and the Cointets were “outside brokers,” in the language of the Stock Exchange, none the less among them they could set some hundreds of thousands of francs moving every three months in the markets of Paris, Bordeaux, and Angouleme. Now it so fell out that that very evening Cointet Brothers had received Lucien's forged bills in the course of business. Upon this debt, tall Cointet forthwith erected a formidable engine, pointed, as will presently be seen, against the poor, patient inventor.

By seven o'clock next morning, Boniface Cointet was taking a walk by the mill stream that turned the wheels in his big factory; the sound of the water covered his talk, for he was talking with a companion, a young man of nine-and-twenty, who had been appointed attorney to the Court of First Instance in Angouleme some six weeks ago. The young man's name was Pierre Petit-Claud.

“You are a schoolfellow of David Sechard’s, are you not?” asked tall Cointet by way of greeting to the young attorney. Petit-Claud had lost no time in answering the wealthy manufacturer’s summons.

“Yes, sir,” said Petit-Claud, keeping step with tall Cointet.

“Have you renewed the acquaintance?”

“We have met once or twice at most since he came back. It could hardly have been otherwise. In Paris I was buried away in the office or at the courts on week-days, and on Sundays and holidays I was hard at work studying, for I had only myself to look to.” (Tall Cointet nodded approvingly.) “When we met again, David and I, he asked me what I had done with myself. I told him that after I had finished my time at Poitiers, I had risen to be Maitre Olivet’s head-clerk, and that some time or other I hoped to make a bid for his berth. I know a good deal more of Lucien Chardon (de Rubempre he calls himself now), he was Mme. de Bargeton’s lover, our great poet, David Sechard’s brother-in-law, in fact.”

“Then you can go and tell David of your appointment, and offer him your services,” said tall Cointet.

“One can’t do that,” said the young attorney.

“He has never had a lawsuit, and he has no attorney, so one can do that,” said Cointet, scanning the other narrowly from behind his colored spectacles.

A certain quantity of gall mingled with the blood in Pierre Petit-Claud’s veins; his father was a tailor in L’Houmeau, and his schoolfellows had looked down upon him. His complexion was of the muddy and unwholesome kind which tells a tale of bad health, late hours and penury, and almost always of a bad disposition. The best description of him may be given in two familiar expressions – he was sharp and snappish. His cracked voice suited his sour face, meagre look, and magpie eyes of no particular color. A magpie eye, according to Napoleon, is a sure sign of dishonesty. “Look at So-and-so,” he said to Las Cases at Saint Helena, alluding to a confidential servant whom he had been obliged to dismiss for malversation. “I do not know how I could have been deceived in him for so long; he has a magpie eye.” Tall Cointet, surveying the weedy little lawyer, noted his face pitted with smallpox, the thin hair, and the forehead, bald already, receding towards a bald cranium; saw, too, the confession of weakness in his attitude with the hand on the hip. “Here is my man,” said he to himself.

As a matter of fact, this Petit-Claud, who had drunk scorn like water, was eaten up with a strong desire to succeed in life; he had no money, but nevertheless he had the audacity to buy his employer’s connection for thirty thousand francs, reckoning upon a rich marriage to clear off the debt, and looking to his employer, after the usual custom, to find him a wife, for an attorney always has an interest in marrying his successor, because he is the sooner paid off. But if Petit-Claud counted upon his employer, he counted yet more upon himself. He had more than average ability, and that of a kind not often found in the provinces, and rancor was the mainspring of his power. A mighty hatred makes a mighty effort.

There is a great difference between a country attorney and an attorney in Paris; tall Cointet was too clever not to know this, and to turn the meaner passions that move a pettifogging lawyer to good account. An eminent attorney in Paris, and there are many who may be so qualified, is bound to possess to some extent the diplomate’s qualities; he had so much business to transact, business in which large interests are involved; questions of such wide interest are submitted to him that he does not look upon procedure as machinery for bringing money into his pocket, but as a weapon of attack and defence. A country attorney, on the other hand, cultivates the science of costs, *brouille*, as it is called in Paris, a host of small items that swell lawyers’ bills and require stamped paper. These weighty matters of the law completely fill the country attorney’s mind; he has a bill of costs always before his eyes, whereas his brother of Paris thinks of nothing but his fees. The fee is a honorarium paid by a client over and above the bill of costs, for the more or less skilful conduct of his case. One-half of the bill of costs goes to the Treasury, whereas the entire fee belongs to the attorney. Let us admit frankly that the fees received are seldom as large as the fees demanded and deserved by a

clever lawyer. Wherefore, in Paris, attorneys, doctors, and barristers, like courtesans with a chance-come lover, take very considerable precautions against the gratitude of clients. The client before and after the lawsuit would furnish a subject worthy of Meissonier; there would be brisk bidding among attorneys for the possession of two such admirable bits of genre.

There is yet another difference between the Parisian and the country attorney. An attorney in Paris very seldom appears in court, though he is sometimes called upon to act as arbitrator (*refere*). Barristers, at the present day, swarm in the provinces; but in 1822 the country attorney very often united the functions of solicitor and counsel. As a result of this double life, the attorney acquired the peculiar intellectual defects of the barrister, and retained the heavy responsibilities of the attorney. He grew talkative and fluent, and lost his lucidity of judgment, the first necessity for the conduct of affairs. If a man of more than ordinary ability tries to do the work of two men, he is apt to find that the two men are mediocrities. The Paris attorney never spends himself in forensic eloquence; and as he seldom attempts to argue for and against, he has some hope of preserving his mental rectitude. It is true that he brings the balista of the law to work, and looks for the weapons in the armory of judicial contradictions, but he keeps his own convictions as to the case, while he does his best to gain the day. In a word, a man loses his head not so much by thinking as by uttering thoughts. The spoken word convinces the utterer; but a man can act against his own bad judgment without warping it, and contrive to win in a bad cause without maintaining that it is a good one, like the barrister. Perhaps for this very reason an old attorney is the more likely of the two to make a good judge.

A country attorney, as we have seen, has plenty of excuses for his mediocrity; he takes up the cause of petty passions, he undertakes pettifogging business, he lives by charging expenses, he strains the Code of procedure and pleads in court. In a word, his weak points are legion; and if by chance you come across a remarkable man practising as a country attorney, he is indeed above the average level.

"I thought, sir, that you sent for me on your own affairs," said Petit-Claud, and a glance that put an edge on his words fell upon tall Cointet's impenetrable blue spectacles.

"Let us have no beating about the bush," returned Boniface Cointet. "Listen to me."

After that beginning, big with mysterious import, Cointet set himself down upon a bench, and beckoned Petit-Claud to do likewise.

"When M. du Hautoy came to Angouleme in 1804, on his way to his consulship at Valence, he made the acquaintance of Mme. de Senonches, then Mlle. Zephirine, and had a daughter by her," added Cointet for the attorney's ear – "Yes," he continued, as Petit-Claud gave a start; "yes, and Mlle. Zephirine's marriage with M. de Senoches soon followed the birth of the child. The girl was brought up in my mother's house; she is the Mlle. Francoise de la Haye in whom Mme. de Senoches takes an interest; she is her godmother in the usual style. Now, my mother farmed land belonging to old Mme. de Cardanet, Mlle. Zephirine's grandmother; and as she knew the secret of the sole heiress of the Cardanets and the Senonches of the older branch, they made me trustee for the little sum which M. Francois du Hautoy meant for the girl's fortune. I made my own fortune with those ten thousand francs, which amount to thirty thousand at the present day. Mme. de Senonches is sure to give the wedding clothes, and some plate and furniture to her goddaughter. Now, I can put you in the way of marrying the girl, my lad," said Cointet, slapping Petit-Claud on the knee; "and when you marry Francoise de la Haye, you will have a large number of the aristocracy of Angouleme as your clients. This understanding between us (under the rose) will open up magnificent prospects for you. Your position will be as much as any one could want; in fact, they don't ask better, I know."

"What is to be done?" Petit-Claud asked eagerly. "You have an attorney, Maitre Cachan –"

"And, moreover, I shall not leave Cachan at once for you; I shall only be your client later on," said Cointet significantly. "What is to be done, do you ask, my friend? Eh! why, David Sechard's business. The poor devil has three thousand francs' worth of bills to meet; he will not meet them; you will stave off legal proceedings in such a way as to increase the expenses enormously. Don't trouble

yourself; go on, pile on items. Doublon, my process-server, will act under Cachan's directions, and he will lay on like a blacksmith. A word to the wise is sufficient. Now, young man? – ”

An eloquent pause followed, and the two men looked at each other.

“We have never seen each other,” Cointet resumed; “I have not said a syllable to you; you know nothing about M. du Hautoy, nor Mme. de Senonches, nor Mlle. de la Haye; only, when the time comes, two months hence, you will propose for the young lady. If we should want to see each other, you will come here after dark. Let us have nothing in writing.”

“Then you mean to ruin Sechard?” asked Petit-Claud.

“Not exactly; but he must be in jail for some time – ”

“And what is the object?”

“Do you think that I am noodle enough to tell you that? If you have wit enough to find out, you will have sense enough to hold your tongue.”

“Old Sechard has plenty of money,” said Petit-Claud. He was beginning already to enter into Boniface Cointet's notions, and foresaw a possible cause of failure.

“So long as the father lives, he will not give his son a farthing; and the old printer has no mind as yet to send in an order for his funeral cards.”

“Agreed!” said Petit-Claud, promptly making up his mind. “I don't ask you for guarantees; I am an attorney. If any one plays me a trick, there will be an account to settle between us.”

“The rogue will go far,” thought Cointet; he bade Petit-Claud good-morning.

The day after this conference was the 30th of April, and the Cointets presented the first of the three bills forged by Lucien. Unluckily, the bill was brought to poor Mme. Sechard; and she, seeing at once that the signature was not in her husband's handwriting, sent for David and asked him point-blank:

“You did not put your name to that bill, did you?”

“No,” said he; “your brother was so pressed for time that he signed for me.”

Eve returned the bill to the bank messenger sent by the Cointets.

“We cannot meet it,” she said; then, feeling that her strength was failing, she went up to her room. David followed her.

“Go quickly to the Cointets, dear,” Eve said faintly; “they will have some consideration for you; beg them to wait; and call their attention besides to the fact that when Cerizet's lease is renewed, they will owe you a thousand francs.”

David went forthwith to his enemies. Now, any foreman may become a master printer, but there are not always the makings of a good man of business in a skilled typographer; David knew very little of business; when, therefore, with a heavily-beating heart and a sensation of throttling, David had put his excuses badly enough and formulated his request, the answer – “This is nothing to do with us; the bill has been passed on to us by Metivier; Metivier will pay us. Apply to M. Metivier” – cut him short at once.

“Oh!” cried Eve when she heard the result, “as soon as the bill is returned to M. Metivier, we may be easy.”

At two o'clock the next day, Victor-Ange-Hermenegilde Doublon, bailiff, made protest for non-payment at two o'clock, a time when the Place du Murier is full of people; so that though Doublon was careful to stand and chat at the back door with Marion and Kolb, the news of the protest was known all over the business world of Angouleme that evening. Tall Cointet had enjoined it upon Master Doublon to show the Sechards the greatest consideration; but when all was said and done, could the bailiff's hypocritical regard for appearances save Eve and David from the disgrace of a suspension of payment? Let each judge for himself. A tolerably long digression of this kind will seem all too short; and ninety out of every hundred readers shall seize with avidity upon details that possess all the piquancy of novelty, thus establishing yet once again the trust of the well-known axiom, that there is nothing so little known as that which everybody is supposed to know – the Law of the Land, to wit.

And of a truth, for the immense majority of Frenchmen, a minute description of some part of the machinery of banking will be as interesting as any chapter of foreign travel. When a tradesman living in one town gives a bill to another tradesman elsewhere (as David was supposed to have done for Lucien's benefit), the transaction ceases to be a simple promissory note, given in the way of business by one tradesman to another in the same place, and becomes in some sort a letter of exchange. When, therefore, Metivier accepted Lucien's three bills, he was obliged to send them for collection to his correspondents in Angouleme – to Cointet Brothers, that is to say. Hence, likewise, a certain initial loss for Lucien in exchange on Angouleme, taking the practical shape of an abatement of so much per cent over and above the discount. In this way Sechard's bills had passed into circulation in the bank. You would not believe how greatly the quality of banker, united with the august title of creditor, changes the debtor's position. For instance, when a bill has been passed through the bank (please note that expression), and transferred from the money market in Paris to the financial world of Angouleme, if that bill is protested, then the bankers in Angouleme must draw up a detailed account of the expenses of protest and return; 'tis a duty which they owe to themselves. Joking apart, no account of the most romantic adventure could be more mildly improbable than this of the journey made by a bill. Behold a certain article in the Code of commerce authorizing the most ingenious pleasantries after Mascarille's manner, and the interpretation thereof shall make apparent manifold atrocities lurking beneath the formidable word "legal."

Master Doublon registered the protest and went himself with it to MM. Cointet Brothers. The firm had a standing account with their bailiff; he gave them six months' credit; and the lynxes of Angouleme practically took a twelvemonth, though tall Cointet would say month by month to the lynxes' jackal, "Do you want any money, Doublon?" Nor was this all. Doublon gave the influential house a rebate upon every transaction; it was the merest trifle, one franc fifty centimes on a protest, for instance.

Tall Cointet quietly sat himself down at his desk and took out a small sheet of paper with a thirty-five centime stamp upon it, chatting as he did so with Doublon as to the standing of some of the local tradesmen.

"Well, are you satisfied with young Gannerac?"

"He is not doing badly. Lord, a carrier drives a trade –"

"Drives a trade, yes; but, as a matter of fact, his expenses are a heavy pull on him; his wife spends a good deal, so they tell me –"

"Of *his* money?" asked Doublon, with a knowing look.

The lynx meanwhile had finished ruling his sheet of paper, and now proceeded to trace the ominous words at the head of the following account in bold characters: —

ACCOUNT OF EXPENSES OF PROTEST AND RETURN

To one bill for one thousand francs, bearing date of February the tenth, eighteen hundred and twenty-two, drawn by Sechard junior of Angouleme, to order of Lucien Chardon, otherwise de Rubempre, endorsed to order of Metivier, and finally to our order, matured the thirtieth of April last, protested by Doublon, process-server, on the first of May, eighteen hundred and twenty-two. fr. c.

Principal	1000	—
Expenses of Protest.	12	35
Bank charges, one-half per cent.	5	—
Brokerage, one-quarter per cent.	2	50
Stamp on re-draft and present account.	1	35
Interest and postage	3	—
	1024	20
Exchange at the rate of one and a quarter per cent on 1024 fr. 20 c.	13	25
Total.	1037	45

One thousand and thirty-seven francs forty-five centimes, for which we repay ourselves by our draft at sight upon M. Metivier, Rue Serpente, Paris, payable to order of M. Gannerac of L'Houmeau.

ANGOULEME, May 2, 1822 COINTET BROTHERS.

At the foot of this little memorandum, drafted with the ease that comes of long practice (for the writer chatted with Doublon as he wrote), there appeared the subjoined form of declaration: —

“We, the undersigned, Postel of L'Houmeau, pharmaceutical chemist, and Gannerac, forwarding agent, merchant of this town, hereby certify that the present rate of exchange on Paris is one and a quarter per cent.

“ANGOULEME, May 2, 1822.”

“Here, Doublon, be so good as to step round and ask Postel and Gannerac to put their names to this declaration, and bring it back with you to-morrow morning.”

And Doublon, quite accustomed as he was to these instruments of torture, forthwith went, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. Evidently the protest might have been sent in an envelope, as in Paris, and even so all Angouleme was sure to hear of the poor Sechards' unlucky predicament. How they all blamed his want of business energy! His excessive fondness for his wife had been the ruin of him, according to some; others maintained that it was his affection for his brother-in-law; and what shocking conclusions did they not draw from these premises! A man ought never to embrace the interests of his kith and kin. Old Sechard's hard-hearted conduct met with approval, and people admired him for his treatment of his son!

And now, all you who for any reason whatsoever should forget to “honor your engagements,” look well into the methods of the banking business, by which one thousand francs may be made to pay interest at the rate of twenty-eight francs in ten minutes, without breaking the law of the land.

The thousand francs, the one incontestable item in the account, comes first.

The second item is shared between the bailiff and the Inland Revenue Department. The six francs due to the State for providing a piece of stamped paper, and putting the debtor's mortification on record, will probably ensure a long life to this abuse; and as you already know, one franc fifty centimes from this item found its way into the banker's pockets in the shape of Doublon's rebate.

“Bank charges one-half per cent,” runs the third item, which appears upon the ingenious plea that if a banker has not received payment, he has for all practical purposes discounted a bill. And although the contrary may be the case, if you fail to receive a thousand francs, it seems to be very much the same thing as if you had paid them away. Everybody who has discounted a bill knows that he has to pay more than the six per cent fixed by law; for a small percentage appears under the humble title of “charges,” representing a premium on the financial genius and skill with which the capitalist puts his money out to interest. The more money he makes out of you, the more he asks. Wherefore it would be undoubtedly cheaper to discount a bill with a fool, if fools there be in the profession of bill-discounting.

The law requires the banker to obtain a stock-broker's certificate for the rate of exchange. When a place is so unlucky as to boast no stock exchange, two merchants act instead. This is the significance of the item “brokerage”; it is a fixed charge of a quarter per cent on the amount of the protested bill. The custom is to consider the amount as paid to the merchants who act for the stock-

broker, and the banker quietly puts the money into his cash-box. So much for the third item in this delightful account.

The fourth includes the cost of the piece of stamped paper on which the account itself appears, as well as the cost of the stamp for re-draft, as it is ingeniously named, viz., the banker's draft upon his colleague in Paris.

The fifth is a charge for postage and the legal interest due upon the amount for the time that it may happen to be absent from the banker's strong box.

The final item, the exchange, is the object for which the bank exists, which is to say, for the transmission of sums of money from one place to another.

Now, sift this account thoroughly, and what do you find? The method of calculation closely resembles Polichinelle's arithmetic in Lablache's Neapolitan song, "fifteen and five make twenty-two." The signatures of Messieurs Postel and Gannerac were obviously given to oblige in the way of business; the Cointets would act at need for Gannerac as Gannerac acted for the Cointets. It was a practical application of the well-known proverb, "Reach me the rhubarb and I will pass you the senna." Cointet Brothers, moreover, kept a standing account with Metivier; there was no need of a re-draft, and no re-draft was made. A returned bill between the two firms simply meant a debit or credit entry and another line in a ledger.

This highly-colored account, therefore, is reduced to the one thousand francs, with an additional thirteen francs for expenses of protest, and half per cent for a month's delay, one thousand and eighteen francs it may be in all.

Suppose that in a large banking-house a bill for a thousand francs is daily protested on an average, then the banker receives twenty-eight francs a day by the grace of God and the constitution of the banking system, that all powerful invention due to the Jewish intellect of the Middle Ages, which after six centuries still controls monarchs and peoples. In other words, a thousand francs would bring such a house twenty-eight francs per day, or ten thousand two hundred and twenty francs per annum. Triple the average of protests, and consequently of expenses, and you shall derive an income of thirty thousand francs per annum, interest upon purely fictitious capital. For which reason, nothing is more lovingly cultivated than these little "accounts of expenses."

If David Sechard had come to pay his bill on the 3rd of May, that is, the day after it was protested, MM. Cointet Brothers would have met him at once with, "We have returned your bill to M. Metivier," although, as a matter of fact, the document would have been lying upon the desk. A banker has a right to make out the account of expenses on the evening of the day when the bill is protested, and he uses the right to "sweat the silver crowns," in the country banker's phrase.

The Kellers, with correspondents all over the world, make twenty thousand francs per annum by charges for postage alone; accounts of expenses of protest pay for Mme. la Baronne de Nucingen's dresses, opera box, and carriage. The charge for postage is a more shocking swindle, because a house will settle ten matters of business in as many lines of a single letter. And of the tithe wrung from misfortune, the Government, strange to say! takes its share, and the national revenue is swelled by a tax on commercial failure. And the Bank? from the august height of a counting-house she flings an observation, full of commonsense, at the debtor, "How is it?" asks she, "that you cannot meet your bill?" and, unluckily, there is no reply to the question. Wherefore, the "account of expenses" is an account bristling with dreadful fictions, fit to cause any debtor, who henceforth shall reflect upon this instructive page, a salutary shudder.

On the 4th of May, Metivier received the account from Cointet Brothers, with instructions to proceed against M. Lucien Chardon, otherwise de Rubempre, with the utmost rigor of the law.

Eve also wrote to M. Metivier, and a few days later received an answer which reassured her completely: —

To M. Sechard, Junior, Printer, Angouleme

“I have duly received your esteemed favor of the 5th instant. From your explanation of the bill due on April 30th, I understand that you have obliged your brother-in-law, M. de Rubempre, who is spending so much that it will be doing you a service to summons him. His present position is such that he is likely to delay payment for long. If your brother-in-law should refuse payment, I shall rely upon the credit of your old-established house. – I sign myself now, as ever, your obedient servant,
“*Metivier.*”

“Well,” said Eve, commenting upon the letter to David, “Lucien will know when they summons him that we could not pay.”

What a change wrought in Eve those few words meant! The love that grew deeper as she came to know her husband’s character better and better, was taking the place of love for her brother in her heart. But to how many illusions had she not bade farewell?

And now let us trace out the whole history of the bill and the account of expenses in the business world of Paris. The law enacts that the third holder, the technical expression for the third party into whose hands the bill passes, is at liberty to proceed for the whole amount against any one of the various endorsers who appears to him to be most likely to make prompt payment. M. Metivier, using this discretion, served a summons upon Lucien. Behold the successive stages of the proceedings, all of them perfectly futile. Metivier, with the Cointets behind him, knew that Lucien was not in a position to pay, but insolvency in fact is not insolvency in law until it has been formally proved.

Formal proof of Lucien’s inability to pay was obtained in the following manner:

On the 5th of May, Metivier’s process-server gave Lucien notice of the protest and an account of the expense thereof, and summoned him to appear before the Tribunal of Commerce, or County Court, of Paris, to hear a vast number of things: this, among others, that he was liable to imprisonment as a merchant. By the time that Lucien, hard pressed and hunted down on all sides, read this jargon, he received notice of judgment against him by default. Coralie, his mistress, ignorant of the whole matter, imagined that Lucien had obliged his brother-in-law, and handed him all the documents together – too late. An actress sees so much of bailiffs, duns, and writs, upon the stage, that she looks on all stamped paper as a farce.

Tears filled Lucien’s eyes; he was unhappy on Sechard’s account, he was ashamed of the forgery, he wished to pay, he desired to gain time. Naturally he took counsel of his friends. But by the time Lousteau, Blondet, Bixiou, and Nathan had told the poet to snap his fingers at a court only established for tradesmen, Lucien was already in the clutches of the law. He beheld upon his door the little yellow placard which leaves its reflection on the porter’s countenance, and exercises a most astringent influence upon credit; striking terror into the heart of the smallest tradesman, and freezing the blood in the veins of a poet susceptible enough to care about the bits of wood, silken rags, dyed woolen stuffs, and multifarious gimcracks entitled furniture.

When the broker’s men came for Coralie’s furniture, the author of the *Marguerites* fled to a friend of Bixiou’s, one Desroches, a barrister, who burst out laughing at the sight of Lucien in such a state about nothing at all.

“That is nothing, my dear fellow. Do you want to gain time?”

“Yes, as much possible.”

“Very well, apply for stay of execution. Go and look up Masson, he is a solicitor in the Commercial Court, and a friend of mine. Take your documents to him. He will make a second application for you, and give notice of objection to the jurisdiction of the court. There is not the least

difficulty; you are a journalist, your name is well known enough. If they summons you before a civil court, come to me about it, that will be my affair; I engage to send anybody who offers to annoy the fair Coralie about his business.”

On the 28th of May, Lucien’s case came on in the civil court, and judgment was given before Desroches expected it. Lucien’s creditor was pushing on the proceedings against him. A second execution was put in, and again Coralie’s pilasters were gilded with placards. Desroches felt rather foolish; a colleague had “caught him napping,” to use his own expression. He demurred, not without reason, that the furniture belonged to Mlle. Coralie, with whom Lucien was living, and demanded an order for inquiry. Thereupon the judge referred the matter to the registrar for inquiry, the furniture was proved to belong to the actress, and judgment was entered accordingly. Metivier appealed, and judgment was confirmed on appeal on the 30th of June.

On the 7th of August, Maitre Cachan received by the coach a bulky package endorsed, “Metivier *versus* Sechard and Lucien Chardon.”

The first document was a neat little bill, of which a copy (accuracy guaranteed) is here given for the reader’s benefit: —

		Sechard,	
		fr.	c.
To Bill due the last day of April, drawn by junior, to order of Lucien de Rubempre, together with expenses of protest and return			
		1037	45
May	5th—Serving notice of protest and summons to appear before the Tribunal of Commerce in Paris, May 7th	8	75
"	7th—Judgment by default and warrant of arrest	35	—
"	10th—Notification of judgment	8	50
"	12th—Warrant of execution	5	50
"	14th—Inventory and appraisement previous to execution	16	—
"	18th—Expenses of affixing placards	15	25
"	19th—Registration	4	—
"	24th—Verification of inventory, and application for stay of execution on the part of the said Lucien de Rubempre, objecting to the jurisdiction of the Court	12	—
"	27th—Order of the Court upon application duly repeated, and transfer of of case to the Civil Court	35	—
	Carried forward	1177	45
		fr.	c.
		1177	45
Brought forward			
May	28th—Notice of summary proceedings in the Civil Court at the instance of Metivier, represented by counsel	6	50
June	2nd—Judgment, after hearing both parties, condemning Lucien for expenses of protest and return; the plaintiff to bear costs of proceedings in the Commercial Court	150	—
"	6th—Notification of judgment	10	—
"	15th—Warrant of execution	5	50
"	19th—Inventory and appraisement preparatory to execution; interpleader summons by the Demoiselle Coralie, claiming goods and chattels taken in execution; demand for immediate special inquiry before further proceedings be taken	20	—
"	" —Judge’s order referring matter to		

registrar for immediate special inquiry. . .	40	-
" " -Judgment in favor of the said Mademoiselle Coralie	250	-
" 20th-Appeal by Metivier	17	-
" 30th-Confirmation of judgment	250	-
Total	1926	45
<hr/>		
Bill matured May 31st, with expenses of	fr.	c.
protest and return.	1037	45
Serving notice of protest.	8	75
Total	1046	20
<hr/>		
Bill matured June 30th, with expenses of		
protest and return.	1037	45
Serving notice of protest.	8	75
Total	1046	20

This document was accompanied by a letter from Metivier, instructing Maitre Cachan, notary of Angouleme, to prosecute David Sechard with the utmost rigor of the law. Wherefore Maitre Victor-Ange-Hermenegilde Doublon summoned David Sechard before the Tribunal of Commerce in Angouleme for the sum-total of four thousand and eighteen francs eighty-five centimes, the amount of the three bills and expenses already incurred. On the morning of the very day when Doublon served the writ upon Eve, requiring her to pay a sum so enormous in her eyes, there came a letter like a thunderbolt from Metivier: —

To Monsieur Sechard, Junior, Printer, Angouleme

“SIR, — Your brother-in-law, M. Chardon, is so shamelessly dishonest, that he declares his furniture to be the property of an actress with whom he is living. You ought to have informed me candidly of these circumstances, and not have allowed me to go to useless expense over law proceedings. I have received no answer to my letter of the 10th of May last. You must not, therefore, take it amiss if I ask for immediate repayment of the three bills and the expenses to which I have been put. — Yours, etc.,
“*METIVIER.*”

Eve had heard nothing during these months, and supposed, in her ignorance of commercial law, that her brother had made reparation for his sins by meeting the forged bills.

“Be quick, and go at once to Petit-Claud, dear,” she said; “tell him about it, and ask his advice.” David hurried to his schoolfellow’s office.

“When you came to tell me of your appointment and offered me your services, I did not think that I should need them so soon,” he said.

Petit-Claud studied the fine face of this man who sat opposite him in the office chair, and scarcely listened to the details of the case, for he knew more of them already than the speaker. As soon as he saw Sechard’s anxiety, he said to himself, “The trick has succeeded.”

This kind of comedy is often played in an attorney’s office. “Why are the Cointets persecuting him?” Petit-Claud wondered within himself, for the attorney can use his wit to read his clients’ thoughts as clearly as the ideas of their opponents, and it is his business to see both sides of the judicial web.

“You want to gain time,” he said at last, when Sechard had come to an end. “How long do you want? Something like three or four months?”

“Oh! four months! that would be my salvation,” exclaimed David. Petit-Claud appeared to him as an angel.

“Very well. No one shall lay hands on any of your furniture, and no one shall arrest you for four months – But it will cost you a great deal,” said Petit-Claud.

“Eh! what does that matter to me?” cried Sechard.

“You are expecting some money to come in; but are you sure of it?” asked Petit-Claud, astonished at the way in which his client walked into the toils.

“In three months’ time I shall have plenty of money,” said the inventor, with an inventor’s hopeful confidence.

“Your father is still above ground,” suggested Petit-Claud; “he is in no hurry to leave his vines.”

“Do you think that I am counting on my father’s death?” returned David. “I am on the track of a trade secret, the secret of making a sheet of paper as strong as Dutch paper, without a thread of cotton in it, and at a cost of fifty per cent less than cotton pulp.”

“There is a fortune in that!” exclaimed Petit-Claud. He knew now what the tall Cointet meant.

“A large fortune, my friend, for in ten years’ time the demand for paper will be ten times larger than it is to-day. Journalism will be the craze of our day.”

“Nobody knows your secret?”

“Nobody except my wife.”

“You have not told any one what you mean to do – the Cointets, for example?”

“I did say something about it, but in general terms, I think.”

A sudden spark of generosity flashed through Petit-Claud’s rancorous soul; he tried to reconcile Sechard’s interests with the Cointet’s projects and his own.

“Listen, David, we are old schoolfellows, you and I; I will fight your case; but understand this clearly – the defence, in the teeth of the law, will cost you five or six thousand francs! Do not compromise your prospects. I think you will be compelled to share the profits of your invention with some one of our paper manufacturers. Let us see now. You will think twice before you buy or build a paper mill; and there is the cost of the patent besides. All this means time, and money too. The servers of writs will be down upon you too soon, perhaps, although we are going to give them the slip – ”

“I have my secret,” said David, with the simplicity of the man of books.

“Well and good, your secret will be your plank of safety,” said Petit-Claud; his first loyal intention of avoiding a lawsuit by a compromise was frustrated. “I do not wish to know it; but mind this that I tell you. Work in the bowels of the earth if you can, so that no one may watch you and gain a hint from your ways of working, or your plank will be stolen from under your feet. An inventor and a simpleton often live in the same skin. Your mind runs so much on your secrets that you cannot think of everything. People will begin to have their suspicions at last, and the place is full of paper manufacturers. So many manufacturers, so many enemies for you! You are like a beaver with the hunters about you; do not give them your skin – ”

“Thank you, dear fellow, I have told myself all this,” exclaimed Sechard, “but I am obliged to you for showing so much concern for me and for your forethought. It does not really matter to me myself. An income of twelve hundred francs would be enough for me, and my father ought by rights to leave me three times as much some day. Love and thought make up my life – a divine life. I am working for Lucien’s sake and for my wife’s.”

“Come, give me this power of attorney, and think of nothing but your discovery. If there should be any danger of arrest, I will let you know in time, for we must think of all possibilities. And let me tell you again to allow no one of whom you are not so sure as you are of yourself to come into your place.”

“Cerizet did not care to continue the lease of the plant and premises, hence our little money difficulties. We have no one at home now but Marion and Kolb, an Alsacien as trusty as a dog, and my wife and her mother – ”

“One word,” said Petit-Claud, “don’t trust that dog – ”

“You do not know him,” exclaimed David; “he is like a second self.”

“May I try him?”

“Yes,” said Sechard.

“There, good-bye, but send Mme. Sechard to me; I must have a power of attorney from your wife. And bear in mind, my friend, that there is a fire burning in your affairs,” said Petit-Claud, by way of warning of all the troubles gathering in the law courts to burst upon David’s head.

“Here am I with one foot in Burgundy and the other in Champagne,” he added to himself as he closed the office door on David.

Harassed by money difficulties, beset with fears for his wife’s health, stung to the quick by Lucien’s disgrace, David had worked on at his problem. He had been trying to find a single process to replace the various operations of pounding and maceration to which all flax or cotton or rags, any vegetable fibre, in fact, must be subjected; and as he went to Petit-Claud’s office, he abstractedly chewed a bit of nettle stalk that had been steeping in water. On his way home, tolerably satisfied with his interview, he felt a little pellet sticking between his teeth. He laid it on his hand, flattened it out, and saw that the pulp was far superior to any previous result. The want of cohesion is the great drawback of all vegetable fibre; straw, for instance, yields a very brittle paper, which may almost be called metallic and resonant. These chances only befall bold inquirers into Nature’s methods!

“Now,” said he to himself, “I must contrive to do by machinery and some chemical agency the thing that I myself have done unconsciously.”

When his wife saw him, his face was radiant with belief in victory. There were traces of tears in Eve’s face.

“Oh! my darling, do not trouble yourself; Petit-Claud will guarantee that we shall not be molested for several months to come. There will be a good deal of expense over it; but, as Petit-Claud said when he came to the door with me, ‘A Frenchman has a right to keep his creditors waiting, provided he repays them capital, interest, and costs.’ – Very well, then, we shall do that – ”

“And live meanwhile?” asked poor Eve, who thought of everything.

“Ah! that is true,” said David, carrying his hand to his ear after the unaccountable fashion of most perplexed mortals.

“Mother will look after little Lucien, and I can go back to work again,” said she.

“Eve! oh, my Eve!” cried David, holding his wife closely to him. – “At Saintes, not very far from here, in the sixteenth century, there lived one of the very greatest of Frenchmen, for he was not merely the inventor of glaze, he was the glorious precursor of Buffon and Cuvier besides; he was the first geologist, good, simple soul that he was. Bernard Palissy endured the martyrdom appointed for all seekers into secrets but his wife and children and all his neighbors were against him. His wife used to sell his tools; nobody understood him, he wandered about the countryside, he was hunted down, they jeered at him. But I – am loved – ”

“Dearly loved!” said Eve, with the quiet serenity of the love that is sure of itself.

“And so may well endure all that poor Bernard Palissy suffered – Bernard Palissy, the discoverer of Ecoen ware, the Huguenot excepted by Charles IX. on the day of Saint-Bartholomew. He lived to be rich and honored in his old age, and lectured on the ‘Science of Earths,’ as he called it, in the face of Europe.”

“So long as my fingers can hold an iron, you shall want for nothing,” cried the poor wife, in tones that told of the deepest devotion. “When I was Mme. Prieur’s forewoman I had a friend among the girls, Basine Clerget, a cousin of Postel’s, a very good child; well, Basine told me the other day when she brought back the linen, that she was taking Mme. Prieur’s business; I will work for her.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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