HONORÉ DE BALZAC

BUREAUCRACY

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. THE RABOURDIN HOUSEHOLD

In Paris, where men of thought and study bear a certain likeness to one another, living as they do in a common centre, you must have met with several resembling Monsieur Rabourdin, whose acquaintance we are about to make at a moment when he is head of a bureau in one of our most important ministries. At this period he was forty years old, with gray hair of so pleasing a shade that women might at a pinch fall in love with it for it softened a somewhat melancholy countenance, blue eyes full of fire, a skin that was still fair, though rather ruddy and touched here and there with strong red marks; a forehead and nose a la Louis XV., a serious mouth, a tall figure, thin, or perhaps wasted, like that of a man just recovering from illness, and finally, a bearing that was midway between the indolence of a mere idler and the thoughtfulness of a busy man. If this portrait serves to depict his character, a sketch of this man's dress will bring it still further into relief. Rabourdin wore habitually a blue surcoat, a white cravat, a waistcoat crossed a la Robespierre, black trousers

without straps, gray silk stockings and low shoes. Well-shaved, and with his stomach warmed by a cup of coffee, he left home at eight in the morning with the regularity of clock-work, always passing along the same streets on his way to the ministry: so neat was he, so formal, so starched that he might have been taken for an Englishman on the road to his embassy.

From these general signs you will readily discern a family man, harassed by vexations in his own household, worried by annoyances at the ministry, yet philosopher enough to take life as he found it; an honest man, loving his country and serving it, not concealing from himself the obstacles in the way of those who seek to do right; prudent, because he knew men; exquisitely courteous with women, of whom he asked nothing, – a man full of acquirements, affable with his inferiors, holding his equals at great distance, and dignified towards his superiors. At the epoch of which we write, you would have noticed in him the coldly resigned air of one who has buried the illusions of his youth and renounced every secret ambition; you would have recognized a discouraged, but not disgusted man, one who still clings to his first projects, – more perhaps to employ his faculties than in the hope of a doubtful success. He was not decorated with any order, and always accused himself of weakness for having worn that of the Fleur-de-lis in the early days of the Restoration.

The life of this man was marked by certain mysterious peculiarities. He had never known his father; his mother, a woman to whom luxury was everything, always elegantly

dressed, always on pleasure bent, whose beauty seemed to him miraculous and whom he very seldom saw, left him little at her death; but she had given him that too common and incomplete education which produces so much ambition and so little ability. A few days before his mother's death, when he was just sixteen, he left the Lycee Napoleon to enter as supernumerary a government office, where an unknown protector had provided him with a place. At twenty-two years of age Rabourdin became under-head-clerk; at twenty-five, head-clerk, or, as it was termed, head of the bureau. From that day the hand that assisted the young man to start in life was never felt again in his career, except as to a single circumstance; it led him, poor and friendless, to the house of a Monsieur Leprince, formerly an auctioneer, a widower said to be extremely rich, and father of an only daughter. Xavier Rabourdin fell desperately in love with Mademoiselle Celestine Leprince, then seventeen years of age, who had all the matrimonial claims of a dowry of two hundred thousand francs. Carefully educated by an artistic mother, who transmitted her own talents to her daughter, this young lady was fitted to attract distinguished men. Tall, handsome, and finely-formed, she was a good musician, drew and painted, spoke several languages, and even knew something of science, – a dangerous advantage, which requires a woman to avoid carefully all appearance of pedantry. Blinded by mistaken tenderness, the mother gave the daughter false ideas as to her probable future; to the maternal eyes a duke or an ambassador, a marshal of France

or a minister of State, could alone give her Celestine her due place in society. The young lady had, moreover, the manners, language, and habits of the great world. Her dress was richer and more elegant than was suitable for an unmarried girl; a husband could give her nothing more than she now had, except happiness. Besides all such indulgences, the foolish spoiling of the mother, who died a year after the girl's marriage, made a husband's task all the more difficult. What coolness and composure of mind were needed to rule such a woman! Commonplace suitors held back in fear. Xavier Rabourdin, without parents and without fortune other than his situation under government, was proposed to Celestine by her father. She resisted for a long time; not that she had any personal objection to her suitor, who was young, handsome, and much in love, but she shrank from the plain name of Madame Rabourdin. Monsieur Leprince assured his daughter that Xavier was of the stock that statesmen came of. Celestine answered that a man named Rabourdin would never be anything under the government of the Bourbons, etc. Forced back to his intrenchments, the father made the serious mistake of telling his daughter that her future husband was certain of becoming Rabourdin "de something or other" before he reached the age of admission to the Chamber. Xavier was soon to be appointed Master of petitions, and general-secretary at his ministry. From these lower steps of the ladder the young man would certainly rise to the higher ranks of the administration, possessed of a fortune and a name bequeathed to him in a certain will of which

he, Monsieur Leprince, was cognizant. On this the marriage took place.

Rabourdin and his wife believed in the mysterious protector to whom the auctioneer alluded. Led away by such hopes and by the natural extravagance of happy love, Monsieur and Madame Rabourdin spent nearly one hundred thousand francs of their capital in the first five years of married life. By the end of this time Celestine, alarmed at the non-advancement of her husband, insisted on investing the remaining hundred thousand francs of her dowry in landed property, which returned only a slender income; but her future inheritance from her father would amply repay all present privations with perfect comfort and ease of life. When the worthy auctioneer saw his son-in-law disappointed of the hopes they had placed on the nameless protector, he tried, for the sake of his daughter, to repair the secret loss by risking part of his fortune in a speculation which had favourable chances of success. But the poor man became involved in one of the liquidations of the house of Nucingen, and died of grief, leaving nothing behind him but a dozen fine pictures which adorned his daughter's salon, and a few old-fashioned pieces of furniture, which she put in the garret.

Eight years of fruitless expectation made Madame Rabourdin at last understand that the paternal protector of her husband must have died, and that his will, if it ever existed, was lost or destroyed. Two years before her father's death the place of chief of division, which became vacant, was given, over her husband's

head, to a certain Monsieur de la Billardiere, related to a deputy of the Right who was made minister in 1823. It was enough to drive Rabourdin out of the service; but how could he give up his salary of eight thousand francs and perquisites, when they constituted three fourths of his income and his household was accustomed to spend them? Besides, if he had patience for a few more years he would then be entitled to a pension. What a fall was this for a woman whose high expectations at the opening of her life were more or less warranted, and one who was admitted on all sides to be a superior woman.

Madame Rabourdin had justified the expectations formed of Mademoiselle Leprince; she possessed the elements of that apparent superiority which pleases the world; her liberal education enabled her to speak to every one in his or her own language; her talents were real; she showed an independent and elevated mind; her conversation charmed as much by its variety and ease as by the oddness and originality of her ideas. Such qualities, useful and appropriate in a sovereign or an ambassadress, were of little service to a household compelled to jog in the common round. Those who have the gift of speaking well desire an audience; they like to talk, even if they sometimes weary others. To satisfy the requirements of her mind Madame Rabourdin took a weekly reception-day and went a great deal into society to obtain the consideration her self-love was accustomed to enjoy. Those who know Parisian life will readily understand how a woman of her temperament suffered,

and was martyrized at heart by the scantiness of her pecuniary means. No matter what foolish declarations people make about money, they one and all, if they live in Paris, must grovel before accounts, do homage to figures, and kiss the forked hoof of the golden calf. What a problem was hers! twelve thousand francs a year to defray the costs of a household consisting of father, mother, two children, a chambermaid and cook, living on the second floor of a house in the rue Duphot, in an apartment costing two thousand francs a year. Deduct the dress and the carriage of Madame before you estimate the gross expenses of the family, for dress precedes everything; then see what remains for the education of the children (a girl of eight and a boy of nine, whose maintenance must cost at least two thousand francs besides) and you will find that Madame Rabourdin could barely afford to give her husband thirty francs a month. That is the position of half the husbands in Paris, under penalty of being thought monsters.

Thus it was that this woman who believed herself destined to shine in the world was condemned to use her mind and her faculties in a sordid struggle, fighting hand to hand with an account-book. Already, terrible sacrifice of pride! she had dismissed her man-servant, not long after the death of her father. Most women grow weary of this daily struggle; they complain but they usually end by giving up to fate and taking what comes to them; Celestine's ambition, far from lessening, only increased through difficulties, and led her, when she found

she could not conquer them, to sweep them aside. To her mind this complicated tangle of the affairs of life was a Gordian knot impossible to untie and which genius ought to cut. Far from accepting the pettiness of middle-class existence, she was angry at the delay which kept the great things of life from her grasp, – blaming fate as deceptive. Celestine sincerely believed herself a superior woman. Perhaps she was right; perhaps she would have been great under great circumstances; perhaps she was not in her right place. Let us remember there are as many varieties of woman as there are of man, all of which society fashions to meet its needs. Now in the social order, as in Nature's order, there are more young shoots than there are trees, more spawn than full-grown fish, and many great capacities (Athanase Granson, for instance) which die withered for want of moisture, like seeds on stony ground. There are, unquestionably, household women, accomplished women, ornamental women, women who are exclusively wives, or mothers, or sweethearts, women purely spiritual or purely material; just as there are soldiers, artists, artisans, mathematicians, poets, merchants, men who understand money, or agriculture, or government, and nothing else. Besides all this, the eccentricity of events leads to endless cross-purposes; many are called and few are chosen is the law of earth as of heaven. Madame Rabourdin conceived herself fully capable of directing a statesman, inspiring an artist, helping an inventor and pushing his interests, or of devoting her powers to the financial politics of a Nucingen, and playing a brilliant part in the great

world. Perhaps she was only endeavouring to excuse to her own mind a hatred for the laundry lists and the duty of overlooking the housekeeping bills, together with the petty economies and cares of a small establishment. She was superior only in those things where it gave her pleasure to be so. Feeling as keenly as she did the thorns of a position which can only be likened to that of Saint-Laurence on his grid-iron, is it any wonder that she sometimes cried out? So, in her paroxysms of thwarted ambition, in the moments when her wounded vanity gave her terrible shooting pains, Celestine turned upon Xavier Rabourdin. Was it not her husband's duty to give her a suitable position in the world? If she were a man she would have had the energy to make a rapid fortune for the sake of rendering an adored wife happy! She reproached him for being too honest a man. In the mouth of some women this accusation is a charge of imbecility. She sketched out for him certain brilliant plans in which she took no account of the hindrances imposed by men and things; then, like all women under the influence of vehement feeling, she became in thought as Machiavellian as Gondreville, and more unprincipled than Maxime de Trailles. At such times Celestine's mind took a wide range, and she imagined herself at the summit of her ideas.

When these fine visions first began Rabourdin, who saw the practical side, was cool. Celestine, much grieved, thought her husband narrow-minded, timid, unsympathetic; and she acquired, insensibly, a wholly false opinion of the companion of her life. In the first place, she often extinguished him by the

brilliancy of her arguments. Her ideas came to her in flashes, and she sometimes stopped him short when he began an explanation, because she did not choose to lose the slightest sparkle of her own mind. From the earliest days of their marriage Celestine, feeling herself beloved and admired by her husband, treated him without ceremony; she put herself above conjugal laws and the rules of private courtesy by expecting love to pardon all her little wrong-doings; and, as she never in any way corrected herself, she was always in the ascendant. In such a situation the man holds to the wife very much the position of a child to a teacher when the latter cannot or will not recognize that the mind he has ruled in childhood is becoming mature. Like Madame de Stael, who exclaimed in a room full of people, addressing, as we may say, a greater man than herself, "Do you know you have really said something very profound!" Madame Rabourdin said of her husband: "He certainly has a good deal of sense at times." Her disparaging opinion of him gradually appeared in her behavior through almost imperceptible motions. Her attitude and manners expressed a want of respect. Without being aware of it she injured her husband in the eyes of others; for in all countries society, before making up its mind about a man, listens for what his wife thinks of him, and obtains from her what the Genevese term "pre-advice."

When Rabourdin became aware of the mistakes which love had led him to commit it was too late, – the groove had been cut; he suffered and was silent. Like other men in whom sentiments

and ideas are of equal strength, whose souls are noble and their brains well balanced, he was the defender of his wife before the tribunal of his own judgment; he told himself that nature doomed her to a disappointed life through his fault; HIS; she was like a thoroughbred English horse, a racer harnessed to a cart full of stones; she it was who suffered; and he blamed himself. His wife, by dint of constant repetition, had inoculated him with her own belief in herself. Ideas are contagious in a household; the ninth thermidor, like so many other portentous events, was the result of female influence. Thus, goaded by Celestine's ambition, Rabourdin had long considered the means of satisfying it, though he hid his hopes, so as to spare her the tortures of uncertainty. The man was firmly resolved to make his way in the administration by bringing a strong light to bear upon it. He intended to bring about one of those revolutions which send a man to the head of either one party or another in society; but being incapable of so doing in his own interests, he merely pondered useful thoughts and dreamed of triumphs won for his country by noble means. His ideas were both generous and ambitious; few officials have not conceived the like; but among officials as among artists there are more miscarriages than births; which is tantamount to Buffon's saying that "Genius is patience."

Placed in a position where he could study French administration and observe its mechanism, Rabourdin worked in the circle where his thought revolved, which, we may remark parenthetically, is the secret of much human accomplishment;

and his labor culminated finally in the invention of a new system for the Civil Service of government. Knowing the people with whom he had to do, he maintained the machine as it then worked, so it still works and will continue to work; for everybody fears to remodel it, though no one, according to Rabourdin, ought to be unwilling to simplify it. In his opinion, the problem to be resolved lay in a better use of the same forces. His plan, in its simplest form, was to revise taxation and lower it in a way that should not diminish the revenues of the State, and to obtain, from a budget equal to the budgets which now excite such rabid discussion, results that should be two-fold greater than the present results. Long practical experience had taught Rabourdin that perfection is brought about in all things by changes in the direction of simplicity. To economize is to simplify. To simplify means to suppress unnecessary machinery; removals naturally follow. His system, therefore, depended on the weeding out of officials and the establishment of a new order of administrative offices. No doubt the hatred which all reformers incur takes its rise here. Removals required by this perfecting process, always ill-understood, threaten the well-being of those on whom a change in their condition is thus forced. What rendered Rabourdin really great was that he was able to restrain the enthusiasm that possesses all reformers, and to patiently seek out a slow evolving medium for all changes so as to avoid shocks, leaving time and experience to prove the excellence of each reform. The grandeur of the result anticipated might make us doubt its possibility if

we lose sight of this essential point in our rapid analysis of his system. It is, therefore, not unimportant to show through his self-communings, however incomplete they might be, the point of view from which he looked at the administrative horizon. This tale, which is evolved from the very heart of the Civil Service, may also serve to show some of the evils of our present social customs.

Xavier Rabourdin, deeply impressed by the trials and poverty which he witnessed in the lives of the government clerks, endeavored to ascertain the cause of their growing deterioration. He found it in those petty partial revolutions, the eddies, as it were, of the storm of 1789, which the historians of great social movements neglect to inquire into, although as a matter of fact it is they which have made our manners and customs what they are now.

Formerly, under the monarchy, the bureaucratic armies did not exist. The clerks, few in number, were under the orders of a prime minister who communicated with the sovereign; thus they directly served the king. The superiors of these zealous servants were simply called head-clerks. In those branches of administration which the king did not himself direct, such for instance as the "fermes" (the public domains throughout the country on which a revenue was levied), the clerks were to their superior what the clerks of a business-house are to their employer; they learned a science which would one day advance them to prosperity. Thus, all points of the circumference were

fastened to the centre and derived their life from it. The result was devotion and confidence. Since 1789 the State, call it the Nation if you like, has replaced the sovereign. Instead of looking directly to the chief magistrate of this nation, the clerks have become, in spite of our fine patriotic ideas, the subsidiaries of the government; their superiors are blown about by the winds of a power called "the administration," and do not know from day to day where they may be on the morrow. As the routine of public business must go on, a certain number of indispensable clerks are kept in their places, though they hold these places on sufferance, anxious as they are to retain them. Bureaucracy, a gigantic power set in motion by dwarfs, was generated in this way. Though Napoleon, by subordinating all things and all men to his will, retarded for a time the influence of bureaucracy (that ponderous curtain hung between the service to be done and the man who orders it), it was permanently organized under the constitutional government, which was, inevitably, the friend of all mediocrities, the lover of authentic documents and accounts, and as meddlesome as an old tradeswoman. Delighted to see the various ministers constantly struggling against the four hundred petty minds of the Elected of the Chamber, with their ten or a dozen ambitious and dishonest leaders, the Civil Service officials hastened to make themselves essential to the warfare by adding their quota of assistance under the form of written action; they created a power of inertia and named it "Report." Let us explain the Report.

When the kings of France took to themselves ministers, which first happened under Louis XV., they made them render reports on all important questions, instead of holding, as formerly, grand councils of state with the nobles. Under the constitutional government, the ministers of the various departments were insensibly led by their bureaus to imitate this practice of kings. Their time being taken up in defending themselves before the two Chambers and the court, they let themselves be guided by the leading-strings of the Report. Nothing important was ever brought before the government that a minister did not say, even when the case was urgent, "I have called for a report." The Report thus became, both as to the matter concerned and for the minister himself, the same as a report to the Chamber of Deputies on a question of laws, – namely, a disquisition in which the reasons for and against are stated with more or less partiality. No real result is attained; the minister, like the Chamber, is fully as well prepared before as after the report is rendered. A determination, in whatever matter, is reached in an instant. Do what we will, the moment comes when the decision must be made. The greater the array of reasons for and against, the less sound will be the judgment. The finest things of which France can boast have been accomplished without reports and where decisions were prompt and spontaneous. The dominant law of a statesman is to apply precise formula to all cases, after the manner of judges and physicians.

Rabourdin, who said to himself: "A minister should have

decision, should know public affairs, and direct their course," saw "Report" rampant throughout France, from the colonel to the marshal, from the commissary of police to the king, from the prefects to the ministers of state, from the Chamber to the courts. After 1818 everything was discussed, compared, and weighed, either in speech or writing; public business took a literary form. France went to ruin in spite of this array of documents; dissertations stood in place of action; a million of reports were written every year; bureaucracy was enthroned! Records, statistics, documents, failing which France would have been ruined, circumlocution, without which there could be no advance, increased, multiplied, and grew majestic. From that day forth bureaucracy used to its own profit the mistrust that stands between receipts and expenditures; it degraded the administration for the benefit of the administrators; in short, it spun those lilliputian threads which have chained France to Parisian centralization, – as if from 1500 to 1800 France had undertaken nothing for want of thirty thousand government clerks! In fastening upon public offices, like a mistletoe on a pear-tree, these officials indemnified themselves amply, and in the following manner.

The ministers, compelled to obey the princes or the Chambers who impose upon them the distribution of the public moneys, and forced to retain the workers in office, proceeded to diminish salaries and increase the number of those workers, thinking that if more persons were employed by government the stronger the

government would be. And yet the contrary law is an axiom written on the universe; there is no vigor except where there are few active principles. Events proved in July, 1830, the error of the materialism of the Restoration. To plant a government in the hearts of a nation it is necessary to bind INTERESTS to it, not MEN. The government-clerks being led to detest the administrations which lessened both their salaries and their importance, treated them as a courtesan treats an aged lover, and gave them mere work for money; a state of things which would have seemed as intolerable to the administration as to the clerks, had the two parties dared to feel each other's pulse, or had the higher salaries not succeeded in stifling the voices of the lower. Thus wholly and solely occupied in retaining his place, drawing his pay, and securing his pension, the government official thought everything permissible that conduced to these results. This state of things led to servility on the part of the clerks and to endless intrigues within the various departments, where the humbler clerks struggled vainly against degenerate members of the aristocracy, who sought positions in the government bureaus for their ruined sons.

Superior men could scarcely bring themselves to tread these tortuous ways, to stoop, to cringe, and creep through the mire of these cloacas, where the presence of a fine mind only alarmed the other denizens. The ambitious man of genius grows old in obtaining his triple crown; he does not follow in the steps of Sixtus the Fifth merely to become head of a bureau. No one

comes or stays in the government offices but idlers, incapables, or fools. Thus the mediocrity of French administration has slowly come about. Bureaucracy, made up entirely of petty minds, stands as an obstacle to the prosperity of the nation; delays for seven years, by its machinery, the project of a canal which would have stimulated the production of a province; is afraid of everything, prolongs procrastination, and perpetuates the abuses which in turn perpetuate and consolidate itself. Bureaucracy holds all things and the administration itself in leading strings; it stifles men of talent who are bold enough to be independent of it or to enlighten it on its own follies. About the time of which we write the pension list had just been issued, and on it Rabourdin saw the name of an underling in office rated for a larger sum than the old colonels, maimed and wounded for their country. In that fact lies the whole history of bureaucracy.

Another evil, brought about by modern customs, which Rabourdin counted among the causes of this secret demoralization, was the fact that there is no real subordination in the administration in Paris; complete equality reigns between the head of an important division and the humblest copying-clerk; one is as powerful as the other in an arena outside of which each lords it in his own way. Education, equally distributed through the masses, brings the son of a porter into a government office to decide the fate of some man of merit or some landed proprietor whose door-bell his father may have answered. The last comer is therefore on equal terms with the oldest veteran in

the service. A wealthy supernumerary splashes his superior as he drives his tilbury to Longchamps and points with his whip to the poor father of a family, remarking to the pretty woman at his side, "That's my chief." The Liberals call this state of things Progress; Rabourdin thought it Anarchy at the heart of power. He saw how it resulted in restless intrigues, like those of a harem between eunuchs and women and imbecile sultans, or the petty troubles of nuns full of underhand vexations, or college tyrannies, or diplomatic manoeuvrings fit to terrify an ambassador, all put in motion to obtain a fee or an increase in salary; it was like the hopping of fleas harnessed to pasteboard cars, the spitefulness of slaves, often visited on the minister himself. With all this were the really useful men, the workers, victims of such parasites; men sincerely devoted to their country, who stood vigorously out from the background of the other incapables, yet who were often forced to succumb through unworthy trickery.

All the higher offices were gained through parliamentary influence, royalty had nothing to do now with them, and the subordinate clerks became, after a time, merely the running-gear of the machine; the most important considerations with them being to keep the wheels well greased. This fatal conviction entering some of the best minds smothered many statements conscientiously written on the secret evils of the national government; lowered the courage of many hearts, and corrupted sterling honesty, weary of injustice and won to indifference by deteriorating annoyances. A clerk in the employ

of the Rothchilds corresponds with all England; another, in a government office, may communicate with all the prefects; but where the one learns the way to make his fortune, the other loses time and health and life to no avail. An undermining evil lies here. Certainly a nation does not seem threatened with immediate dissolution because an able clerk is sent away and a middling sort of man replaces him. Unfortunately for the welfare of nations individual men never seem essential to their existence. But in the long run when the belittling process is fully carried out nations will disappear. Every one who seeks instruction on this point can look at Venice, Madrid, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Rome; all places which were formerly resplendent with mighty powers and are now destroyed by the infiltrating littleness which gradually attained the highest eminence. When the day of struggle came, all was found rotten, the State succumbed to a weak attack. To worship the fool who succeeds, and not to grieve over the fall of an able man is the result of our melancholy education, of our manners and customs which drive men of intellect into disgust, and genius to despair.

What a difficult undertaking is the rehabilitation of the Civil Service while the liberal cries aloud in his newspapers that the salaries of clerks are a standing theft, calls the items of the budget a cluster of leeches, and every year demands why the nation should be saddled with a thousand millions of taxes. In Monsieur Rabourdin's eyes the clerk in relation to the budget was very much what the gambler is to the game; that which he wins he

puts back again. All remuneration implies something furnished. To pay a man a thousand francs a year and demand his whole time was surely to organize theft and poverty. A galley-slave costs nearly as much, and does less. But to expect a man whom the State remunerated with twelve thousand francs a year to devote himself to his country was a profitable contract for both sides, fit to allure all capacities.

These reflections had led Rabourdin to desire the recasting of the clerical official staff. To employ fewer man, to double or treble salaries, and do away with pensions, to choose only young clerks (as did Napoleon, Louis XIV., Richelieu, and Ximenes), but to keep them long and train them for the higher offices and greatest honors, these were the chief features of a reform which if carried out would be as beneficial to the State as to the clerks themselves. It is difficult to recount in detail, chapter by chapter, a plan which embraced the whole budget and continued down through the minutest details of administration in order to keep the whole synthetical; but perhaps a slight sketch of the principal reforms will suffice for those who understand such matters, as well as for those who are wholly ignorant of the administrative system. Though the historian's position is rather hazardous in reproducing a plan which may be thought the politics of a chimney-corner, it is, nevertheless, necessary to sketch it so as to explain the author of it by his own work. Were the recital of his efforts to be omitted, the reader would not believe the narrator's word if he merely declared the talent and the courage of this

official.

Rabourdin's plan divided the government into three ministries, or departments. He thought that if the France of former days possessed brains strong enough to comprehend in one system both foreign and domestic affairs, the France of to-day was not likely to be without its Mazarin, its Suger, its Sully, its de Choiseul, or its Colbert to direct even vast administrative departments. Besides, constitutionally speaking, three ministries will agree better than seven; and, in the restricted number there is less chance for mistaken choice; moreover, it might be that the kingdom would some day escape from those perpetual ministerial oscillations which interfered with all plans of foreign policy and prevented all ameliorations of home rule. In Austria, where many diverse united nations present so many conflicting interests to be conciliated and carried forward under one crown, two statesmen alone bear the burden of public affairs and are not overwhelmed by it. Was France less prolific of political capacities than Germany? The rather silly game of what are called "constitutional institutions" carried beyond bounds has ended, as everybody knows, in requiring a great many offices to satisfy the multifarious ambition of the middle classes. It seemed to Rabourdin, in the first place, natural to unite the ministry of war with the ministry of the navy. To his thinking the navy was one of the current expenses of the war department, like the artillery, cavalry, infantry, and commissariat. Surely it was an absurdity to give separate administrations to admirals

and marshals when both were employed to one end, namely, the defense of the nation, the overthrow of an enemy, and the security of the national possessions. The ministry of the interior ought in like manner to combine the departments of commerce, police, and finances, or it belied its own name. To the ministry of foreign affairs belonged the administration of justice, the household of the king, and all that concerned arts, sciences, and belles lettres. All patronage ought to flow directly from the sovereign. Such ministries necessitated the supremacy of a council. Each required the work of two hundred officials, and no more, in its central administration offices, where Rabourdin proposed that they should live, as in former days under the monarchy. Taking the sum of twelve thousand francs a year for each official as an average, he estimated seven millions as the cost of the whole body of such officials, which actually stood at twenty in the budget.

By thus reducing the ministers to three heads he suppressed departments which had come to be useless, together with the enormous costs of their maintenance in Paris. He proved that an arrondissement could be managed by ten men; a prefecture by a dozen at the most; which reduced the entire civil service force throughout France to five thousand men, exclusive of the departments of war and justice. Under this plan the clerks of the court were charged with the system of loans, and the ministry of the interior with that of registration and the management of domains. Thus Rabourdin united in one centre all divisions that

were allied in nature. The mortgage system, inheritance, and registration did not pass outside of their own sphere of action and only required three additional clerks in the justice courts and three in the royal courts. The steady application of this principle brought Rabourdin to reforms in the finance system. He merged the collection of revenue into one channel, taxing consumption in bulk instead of taxing property. According to his ideas, consumption was the sole thing properly taxable in times of peace. Land-taxes should always be held in reserve in case of war; for then only could the State justly demand sacrifices from the soil, which was in danger; but in times of peace it was a serious political fault to burden it beyond a certain limit; otherwise it could never be depended on in great emergencies. Thus a loan should be put on the market when the country was tranquil, for at such times it could be placed at par, instead of at fifty per cent loss as in bad times; in war times resort should be had to a land-tax.

"The invasion of 1814 and 1815," Rabourdin would say to his friends, "founded in France and practically explained an institution which neither Law nor Napoleon had been able to establish, – I mean Credit."

Unfortunately, Xavier considered the true principles of this admirable machine of civil service very little understood at the period when he began his labor of reform in 1820. His scheme levied a toll on the consumption by means of direct taxation and suppressed the whole machinery of indirect taxation. The

levying of the taxes was simplified by a single classification of a great number of articles. This did away with the more harassing customs at the gates of the cities, and obtained the largest revenues from the remainder, by lessening the enormous expense of collecting them. To lighten the burden of taxation is not, in matters of finance, to diminish the taxes, but to assess them better; if lightened, you increase the volume of business by giving it freer play; the individual pays less and the State receives more. This reform, which may seem immense, rests on very simple machinery. Rabourdin regarded the tax on personal property as the most trustworthy representative of general consumption. Individual fortunes are usually revealed in France by rentals, by the number of servants, horses, carriages, and luxuries, the costs of which are all to the interest of the public treasury. Houses and what they contain vary comparatively but little, and are not liable to disappear. After pointing out the means of making a tax-list on personal property which should be more impartial than the existing list, Rabourdin assessed the sums to be brought into the treasury by indirect taxation as so much per cent on each individual share. A tax is a levy of money on things or persons under disguises that are more or less specious. These disguises, excellent when the object is to extort money, become ridiculous in the present day, when the class on which the taxes weigh the heaviest knows why the State imposes them and by what machinery they are given back. In fact the budget is not a strong-box to hold what is put into it, but a watering-pot; the more it

takes in and the more it pours out the better for the prosperity of the country. Therefore, supposing there are six millions of tax-payers in easy circumstances (Rabourdin proved their existence, including the rich) is it not better to make them pay a duty on the consumption of wine, which would not be more offensive than that on doors and windows and would return a hundred millions, rather than harass them by taxing the thing itself. By this system of taxation, each individual tax-payer pays less in reality, while the State receives more, and consumers profit by a vast reduction in the price of things which the State releases from its perpetual and harassing interference. Rabourdin's scheme retained a tax on the cultivation of vineyards, so as to protect that industry from the too great abundance of its own products. Then, to reach the consumption of the poorer tax-payers, the licences of retail dealers were taxed according to the population of the neighborhoods in which they lived.

In this way, the State would receive without cost or vexatious hindrances an enormous revenue under three forms; namely, a duty on wine, on the cultivation of vineyards, and on licenses, where now an irritating array of taxes existed as a burden on itself and its officials. Taxation was thus imposed upon the rich without overburdening the poor. To give another example. Suppose a share assessed to each person of one or two francs for the consumption of salt and you obtain ten or a dozen millions; the modern "gabelle" disappears, the poor breathe freer, agriculture is relieved, the State receives as much, and no

tax-payer complains. All persons, whether they belong to the industrial classes or to the capitalists, will see at once the benefits of a tax so assessed when they discover how commerce increases, and life is ameliorated in the country districts. In short, the State will see from year to year the number of her well-to-do tax-payers increasing. By doing away with the machinery of indirect taxation, which is very costly (a State, as it were, within a State), both the public finances and the individual tax-payer are greatly benefited, not to speak of the saving in costs of collecting.

The whole subject is indeed less a question of finance than a question of government. The State should possess nothing of its own, neither forests, nor mines, nor public works. That it should be the owner of domains was, in Rabourdin's opinion, an administrative contradiction. The State cannot turn its possessions to profit and it deprives itself of taxes; it thus loses two forms of production. As to the manufactories of the government, they are just as unreasonable in the sphere of industry. The State obtains products at a higher cost than those of commerce, produces them more slowly, and loses its tax upon the industry, the maintenance of which it, in turn, reduces. Can it be thought a proper method of governing a country to manufacture instead of promoting manufactures? to possess property instead of creating more possessions and more diverse ones? In Rabourdin's system the State exacted no money security; he allowed only mortgage securities; and for this reason: Either the State holds the security in specie, and that embarrasses

business and the movement of money; or it invests it at a higher rate than the State itself pays, and that is a contemptible robbery; or else it loses on the transaction, and that is folly; moreover, if it is obliged at any time to dispose of a mass of these securities it gives rises in certain cases to terrible bankruptcy.

The territorial tax did not entirely disappear in Rabourdin's plan, – he kept a minute portion of it as a point of departure in case of war; but the productions of the soil were freed, and industry, finding raw material at a low price, could compete with foreign nations without the deceptive help of customs. The rich carried on the administration of the provinces without compensation except that of receiving a peerage under certain conditions. Magistrates, learned bodies, officers of the lower grades found their services honorably rewarded; no man employed by the government failed to obtain great consideration through the value and extent of his labors and the excellence of his salary; every one was able to provide for his own future and France was delivered from the cancer of pensions. As a result Rabourdin's scheme exhibited only seven hundred millions of expenditures and twelve hundred millions of receipts. A saving of five hundred millions annually had far more virtue than the accumulation of a sinking fund whose dangers were plainly to be seen. In that fund the State, according to Rabourdin, became a stockholder, just as it persisted in being a land-holder and a manufacturer. To bring about these reforms without too roughly jarring the existing state of things or incurring a Saint-

Bartholomew of clerks, Rabourdin considered that an evolution of twenty years would be required.

Such were the thoughts maturing in Rabourdin's mind ever since his promised place had been given to Monsieur de la Billardiere, a man of sheer incapacity. This plan, so vast apparently yet so simple in point of fact, which did away with so many large staffs and so many little offices all equally useless, required for its presentation to the public mind close calculations, precise statistics, and self-evident proof. Rabourdin had long studied the budget under its double-aspect of ways and means and of expenditure. Many a night he had lain awake unknown to his wife. But so far he had only dared to conceive the plan and fit it prospectively to the administrative skeleton; all of which counted for nothing, – he must gain the ear of a minister capable of appreciating his ideas. Rabourdin's success depended on the tranquil condition of political affairs, which up to this time were still unsettled. He had not considered the government as permanently secure until three hundred deputies at least had the courage to form a compact majority systematically ministerial. An administration founded on that basis had come into power since Rabourdin had finished his elaborate plan. At this time the luxury of peace under the Bourbons had eclipsed the warlike luxury of the days when France shone like a vast encampment, prodigal and magnificent because it was victorious. After the Spanish campaign, the administration seemed to enter upon an era of tranquillity in which some good might be accomplished;

and three months before the opening of our story a new reign had begun without any apparent opposition; for the liberalism of the Left had welcomed Charles X. with as much enthusiasm as the Right. Even clear-sighted and suspicious persons were misled. The moment seemed propitious for Rabourdin. What could better conduce to the stability of the government than to propose and carry through a reform whose beneficial results were to be so vast?

Never had Rabourdin seemed so anxious and preoccupied as he now did in the mornings as he walked from his house to the ministry, or at half-past four in the afternoon, when he returned. Madame Rabourdin, on her part, disconsolate over her wasted life, weary of secretly working to obtain a few luxuries of dress, never appeared so bitterly discontented as now; but, like any wife who is really attached to her husband, she considered it unworthy of a superior woman to condescend to the shameful devices by which the wives of some officials eke out the insufficiency of their husband's salary. This feeling made her refuse all intercourse with Madame Colleville, then very intimate with Francois Keller, whose parties eclipsed those of the rue Duphot. Nevertheless, she mistook the quietude of the political thinker and the preoccupation of the intrepid worker for the apathetic torpor of an official broken down by the dulness of routine, vanquished by that most hateful of all miseries, the mediocrity that simply earns a living; and she groaned at being married to a man without energy.

Thus it was that about this period in their lives she resolved to take the making of her husband's fortune on herself; to thrust him at any cost into a higher sphere, and to hide from him the secret springs of her machinations. She carried into all her plans the independence of ideas which characterized her, and was proud to think that she could rise above other women by sharing none of their petty prejudices and by keeping herself untrammelled by the restraints which society imposes. In her anger she resolved to fight fools with their own weapons, and to make herself a fool if need be. She saw things coming to a crisis. The time was favorable. Monsieur de la Billardiere, attacked by a dangerous illness, was likely to die in a few days. If Rabourdin succeeded him, his talents (for Celestine did vouchsafe him an administrative gift) would be so thoroughly appreciated that the office of Master of petitions, formerly promised, would now be given to him; she fancied she saw him the king's commissioner, presenting bills to the Chambers and defending them; then indeed she could help him; she would even be, if needful, his secretary; she would sit up all night to do the work! All this to drive in the Bois in a pretty carriage, to equal Madame Delphine de Nucingen, to raise her salon to the level of Madame Colleville's, to be invited to the great ministerial solemnities, to win listeners and make them talk of her as "Madame Rabourdin DE something or other" (she had not yet determined on the estate), just as they did of Madame Firmiani, Madame d'Espard, Madame d'Aiglemont, Madame de Carigliano, and thus efface

forever the odious name of Rabourdin.

These secret schemes brought some changes into the household. Madame Rabourdin began to walk with a firm step in the path of /debt/. She set up a man-servant, and put him in livery of brown cloth with red pipins, she renewed parts of her furniture, hung new papers on the walls, adorned her salon with plants and flowers, always fresh, and crowded it with knick-knacks that were then in vogue; then she, who had always shown scruples as to her personal expenses, did not hesitate to put her dress in keeping with the rank to which she aspired, the profits of which were discounted in several of the shops where she equipped herself for war. To make her "Wednesdays" fashionable she gave a dinner on Fridays, the guests being expected to pay their return visit and take a cup of tea on the following Wednesday. She chose her guests cleverly among influential deputies or other persons of note who, sooner or later, might advance her interests. In short, she gathered an agreeable and befitting circle about her. People amused themselves at her house; they said so at least, which is quite enough to attract society in Paris. Rabourdin was so absorbed in completing his great and serious work that he took no notice of the sudden reappearance of luxury in the bosom of his family.

Thus the wife and the husband were besieging the same fortress, working on parallel lines, but without each other's knowledge.

CHAPTER II. MONSIEUR DES LUPEAULX

At the ministry to which Rabourdin belonged there flourished, as general-secretary, a certain Monsieur Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx, one of those men whom the tide of political events sends to the surface for a few years, then engulfs on a stormy night, but whom we find again on a distant shore, tossed up like the carcass of a wrecked ship which still seems to have life in her. We ask ourselves if that derelict could ever have held goodly merchandise or served a high emprise, co-operated in some defence, held up the trappings of a throne, or borne away the corpse of a monarchy. At this particular time Clement des Lupeaulx (the "Lupeaulx" absorbed the "Chardin") had reached his culminating period. In the most illustrious lives as in the most obscure, in animals as in secretary-generals, there is a zenith and there is a nadir, a period when the fur is magnificent, the fortune dazzling. In the nomenclature which we derive from fabulists, des Lupeaulx belonged to the species Bertrand, and was always in search of Ratons. As he is one of the principal actors in this drama he deserves a description, all the more precise because the revolution of July has suppressed his office, eminently useful as it was, to a constitutional ministry.

Moralists usually employ their weapons against obstructive

administrations. In their eyes, crime belongs to the assizes or the police-courts; but the socially refined evils escape their ken; the adroitness that triumphs under shield of the Code is above them or beneath them; they have neither eye-glass nor telescope; they want good stout horrors easily visible. With their eyes fixed on the carnivora, they pay no attention to the reptiles; happily, they abandon to the writers of comedy the shading and colorings of a Chardin des Lupeaulx. Vain and egotistical, supple and proud, libertine and gourmand, grasping from the pressure of debt, discreet as a tomb out of which nought issues to contradict the epitaph intended for the passer's eye, bold and fearless when soliciting, good-natured and witty in all acceptations of the word, a timely jester, full of tact, knowing how to compromise others by a glance or a nudge, shrinking from no mudhole, but gracefully leaping it, intrepid Voltairean, yet punctual at mass if a fashionable company could be met in Saint Thomas Aquinas, – such a man as this secretary-general resembled, in one way or another, all the mediocrities who form the kernel of the political world. Knowing in the science of human nature, he assumed the character of a listener, and none was ever more attentive. Not to awaken suspicion he was flattering ad nauseum, insinuating as a perfume, and cajoling as a woman.

Des Lupeaulx was just forty years old. His youth had long been a vexation to him, for he felt that the making of his career depended on his becoming a deputy. How had he reached his present position? may be asked. By very simple means. He began

by taking charge of certain delicate missions which can be given neither to a man who respects himself nor to a man who does not respect himself, but are confided to grave and enigmatic individuals who can be acknowledged or disavowed at will. His business was that of being always compromised; but his fortunes were pushed as much by defeat as by success. He well understood that under the Restoration, a period of continual compromises between men, between things, between accomplished facts and other facts looking on the horizon, it was all-important for the ruling powers to have a household drudge. Observe in a family some old charwoman who can make beds, sweep the floors, carry away the dirty linen, who knows where the silver is kept, how the creditors should be pacified, what persons should be let in and who must be kept out of the house, and such a creature, even if she has all the vices, and is dirty, decrepit, and toothless, or puts into the lottery and steals thirty sous a day for her stake, and you will find the masters like her from habit, talk and consult in her hearing upon even critical matters; she comes and goes, suggests resources, gets on the scent of secrets, brings the rouge or the shawl at the right moment, lets herself be scolded and pushed downstairs, and the next morning reappears smiling with an excellent bouillon. No matter how high a statesman may stand, he is certain to have some household drudge, before whom he is weak, undecided, disputations with fate, self-questioning, self-answering, and buckling for the fight. Such a familiar is like the soft wood of savages, which, when rubbed against the hard wood,

strikes fire. Sometimes great geniuses illumine themselves in this way. Napoleon lived with Berthier, Richelieu with Pere Joseph; des Lupeaulx was the familiar of everybody. He continued friends with fallen ministers and made himself their intermediary with their successors, diffusing thus the perfume of the last flattery and the first compliment. He well understood how to arrange all the little matters which a statesman has no leisure to attend to. He saw necessities as they arose; he obeyed well; he could gloss a base act with a jest and get the whole value of it; and he chose for the services he thus rendered those that the recipients were not likely to forget.

Thus, when it was necessary to cross the ditch between the Empire and the Restoration, at a time when every one was looking about for planks, and the curs of the Empire were howling their devotion right and left, des Lupeaulx borrowed large sums from the usurers and crossed the frontier. Risking all to win all, he bought up Louis XVIII.'s most pressing debts, and was the first to settle nearly three million of them at twenty per cent – for he was lucky enough to be backed by Gobseck in 1814 and 1815. It is true that Messrs. Gobseck, Werdet, and Gigonnet swallowed the profits, but des Lupeaulx had agreed that they should have them; he was not playing for a stake; he challenged the bank, as it were, knowing very well that the king was not a man to forget this debt of honor. Des Lupeaulx was not mistaken; he was appointed Master of petitions, Knight of the order of Saint Louis, and officer of the Legion of honor. Once

on the ladder of political success, his clever mind looked about for the means to maintain his foothold; for in the fortified city into which he had wormed himself, generals do not long keep useless mouths. So to his general trade of household drudge and go-between he added that of gratuitous consultation on the secret maladies of power.

After discovering in the so-called superior men of the Restoration their utter inferiority in comparison with the events which had brought them to the front, he overcame their political mediocrity by putting into their mouths, at a crisis, the word of command for which men of real talent were listening. It must not be thought that this word was the outcome of his own mind. Were it so, des Lupeaulx would have been a man of genius, whereas he was only a man of talent. He went everywhere, collected opinions, sounded consciences, and caught all the tones they gave out. He gathered knowledge like a true and indefatigable political bee. This walking Bayle dictionary did not act, however, like that famous lexicon; he did not report all opinions without drawing his own conclusions; he had the talent of a fly which drops plumb upon the best bit of meat in the middle of a kitchen. In this way he came to be regarded as an indispensable helper to statesmen. A belief in his capacity had taken such deep root in all minds that the more ambitious public men felt it was necessary to compromise des Lupeaulx in some way to prevent his rising higher; they made up to him for his subordinate public position by their secret confidence.

Nevertheless, feeling that such men were dependent on him, this gleaner of ideas exacted certain dues. He received a salary on the staff of the National Guard, where he held a sinecure which was paid for by the city of Paris; he was government commissioner to a secret society; and filled a position of superintendence in the royal household. His two official posts which appeared on the budget were those of secretary-general to his ministry and Master of petitions. What he now wanted was to be made commander of the Legion of honor, gentleman of the bed-chamber, count, and deputy. To be elected deputy it was necessary to pay taxes to the amount of a thousand francs; and the miserable homestead of the des Lupeaulx was rated at only five hundred. Where could he get money to build a mansion and surround it with sufficient domain to throw dust in the eyes of a constituency? Though he dined out every day, and was lodged for the last nine years at the cost of the State, and driven about in the minister's equipage, des Lupeaulx possessed absolutely nothing, at the time when our tale opens, but thirty thousand francs of debt – undisputed property. A marriage might float him and pump the waters of debt out of his bark; but a good marriage depended on his advancement, and his advancement required that he should be a deputy. Searching about him for the means of breaking through this vicious circle, he could think of nothing better than some immense service to render or some delicate intrigue to carry through for persons in power. Alas! conspiracies were out of date; the Bourbons were apparently on

good terms with all parties; and, unfortunately, for the last few years the government had been so thoroughly held up to the light of day by the silly discussions of the Left, whose aim seemed to be to make government of any kind impossible in France, that no good strokes of business could be made. The last were tried in Spain, and what an outcry that excited!

In addition to all this, des Lupeaulx complicated matters by believing in the friendship of his minister, to whom he had the imprudence to express the wish to sit on the ministerial benches. The minister guessed at the real meaning of the desire, which simply was that des Lupeaulx wanted to strengthen a precarious position, so that he might throw off all dependence on his chief. The harrier turned against the huntsman; the minister gave him cuts with the whip and caresses, alternately, and set up rivals to him. But des Lupeaulx behaved like an adroit courtier with all competitors; he laid traps into which they fell, and then he did prompt justice upon them. The more he felt himself in danger the more anxious he became for an irremovable position; yet he was compelled to play low; one moment's indiscretion, and he might lose everything. A pen-stroke might demolish his civilian epaulets, his place at court, his sinecure, his two offices and their advantages; in all, six salaries retained under fire of the law against pluralists. Sometimes he threatened his minister as a mistress threatens her lover; telling him he was about to marry a rich widow. At such times the minister petted and cajoled des Lupeaulx. After one of these reconciliations he received the

formal promise of a place in the Academy of Belles-lettres on the first vacancy. “It would pay,” he said, “the keep of a horse.” His position, so far as it went, was a good one, and Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx flourished in it like a tree planted in good soil. He could satisfy his vices, his caprices, his virtues and his defects.

The following were the toils of his life. He was obliged to choose, among five or six daily invitations, the house where he could be sure of the best dinner. Every morning he went to his minister’s morning reception to amuse that official and his wife, and to pet their children. Then he worked an hour or two; that is to say, he lay back in a comfortable chair and read the newspapers, dictated the meaning of a letter, received visitors when the minister was not present, explained the work in a general way, caught or shed a few drops of the holy-water of the court, looked over the petitions with an eyeglass, or wrote his name on the margin, – a signature which meant “I think it absurd; do what you like about it.” Every body knew that when des Lupeaulx was interested in any person or in any thing he attended to the matter personally. He allowed the head-clerks to converse privately about affairs of delicacy, but he listened to their gossip. From time to time he went to the Tuileries to get his cue. And he always waited for the minister’s return from the Chamber, if in session, to hear from him what intrigue or manoeuvre he was to set about. This official sybarite dressed, dined, and visited a dozen or fifteen salons between eight at night and three in the morning. At the opera he talked with journalists, for he stood

high in their favor; a perpetual exchange of little services went on between them; he poured into their ears his misleading news and swallowed theirs; he prevented them from attacking this or that minister on such or such a matter, on the plea that it would cause real pain to their wives or their mistresses.

"Say that his bill is worth nothing, and prove it if you can, but do not say that Mariette danced badly. The devil! haven't we all played our little plays; and which of us knows what will become of him in times like these? You may be minister yourself to-morrow, you who are spicing the cakes of the 'Constitutionel' to-day."

Sometimes, in return, he helped editors, or got rid of obstacles to the performances of some play; gave gratuities and good dinners at the right moment, or promised his services to bring some affair to a happy conclusion. Moreover, he really liked literature and the arts; he collected autographs, obtained splendid albums gratis, and possessed sketches, engravings, and pictures. He did a great deal of good to artists by simply not injuring them and by furthering their wishes on certain occasions when their self-love wanted some rather costly gratification. Consequently, he was much liked in the world of actors and actresses, journalists and artists. For one thing, they had the same vices and the same indolence as himself. Men who could all say such witty things in their cups or in company with a danseuse, how could they help being friends? If des Lupeaulx had not been a general-secretary he would certainly have been a journalist. Thus, in that

fifteen years' struggle in which the harlequin sabre of epigram opened a breach by which insurrection entered the citadel, des Lupeaulx never received so much as a scratch.

As the young fry of clerks looked at this man playing bowls in the gardens of the ministry with the minister's children, they cracked their brains to guess the secret of his influence and the nature of his services; while, on the other hand, the aristocrats in all the various ministries looked upon him as a dangerous Mephistopheles, courted him, and gave him back with usury the flatteries he bestowed in the higher sphere. As difficult to decipher as a hieroglyphic inscription to the clerks, the vocation of the secretary and his usefulness were as plain as the rule of three to the self-interested. This lesser Prince de Wagram of the administration, to whom the duty of gathering opinions and ideas and making verbal reports thereon was entrusted, knew all the secrets of parliamentary politics; dragged in the lukewarm, fetched, carried, and buried propositions, said the Yes and the No that the ministers dared not say for themselves. Compelled to receive the first fire and the first blows of despair and wrath, he laughed or bemoaned himself with the minister, as the case might be. Mysterious link by which many interests were in some way connected with the Tuileries, and safe as a confessor, he sometimes knew everything and sometimes nothing; and, in addition to all these functions came that of saying for the minister those things that a minister cannot say for himself. In short, with his political Hephaestion the minister might dare to

be himself; to take off his wig and his false teeth, lay aside his scruples, put on his slippers, unbutton his conscience, and give way to his trickery. However, it was not all a bed of roses for des Lupeaulx; he flattered and advised his master, forced to flatter in order to advise, to advise while flattering, and disguise the advice under the flattery. All politicians who follow this trade have bilious faces; and their constant habit of giving affirmative nods acquiescing in what is said to them, or seeming to do so, gives a certain peculiar turn to their heads. They agree indifferently with whatever is said before them. Their talk is full of "buts," "notwithstandings," "for myself I should," "were I in your place" (they often say "in your place"), – phrases, however, which pave the way to opposition.

In person, Clement des Lupeaulx had the remains of a handsome man; five feet six inches tall, tolerably stout, complexion flushed with good living, powdered head, delicate spectacles, and a worn-out air; the natural skin blond, as shown by the hand, puffy like that of an old woman, rather too square, and with short nails – the hand of a satrap. His foot was elegant. After five o'clock in the afternoon des Lupeaulx was always to be seen in open-worked silk stockings, low shoes, black trousers, cashmere waistcoat, cambric handkerchief (without perfume), gold chain, blue coat of the shade called "king's blue," with brass buttons and a string of orders. In the morning he wore creaking boots and gray trousers, and the short close surtout coat of the politician. His general appearance early in the day was that of a

sharp lawyer rather than that of a ministerial officer. Eyes glazed by the constant use of spectacles made him plainer than he really was, if by chance he took those appendages off. To real judges of character, as well as to upright men who are at ease only with honest natures, des Lupeaulx was intolerable. To them, his gracious manners only draped his lies; his amiable protestations and hackneyed courtesies, new to the foolish and ignorant, too plainly showed their texture to an observing mind. Such minds considered him a rotten plank, on which no foot should trust itself.

No sooner had the beautiful Madame Rabourdin decided to interfere in her husband's administrative advancement than she fathomed Clement des Lupeaulx's true character, and studied him thoughtfully to discover whether in this thin strip of deal there were ligneous fibres strong enough to let her lightly trip across it from the bureau to the department, from a salary of eight thousand a year to twelve thousand. The clever woman believed she could play her own game with this political roue; and Monsieur des Lupeaulx was partly the cause of the unusual expenditures which now began and were continued in the Rabourdin household.

The rue Duphot, built up under the Empire, is remarkable for several houses with handsome exteriors, the apartments of which are skilfully laid out. That of the Rabourdins was particularly well arranged, – a domestic advantage which has much to do with the nobleness of private lives. A pretty and rather wide

antechamber, lighted from the courtyard, led to the grand salon, the windows of which looked on the street. To the right of the salon were Rabourdin's study and bedroom, and behind them the dining-room, which was entered from the antechamber; to the left was Madame's bedroom and dressing-room, and behind them her daughter's little bedroom. On reception days the door of Rabourdin's study and that of his wife's bedroom were thrown open. The rooms were thus spacious enough to contain a select company, without the absurdity which attends many middle-class entertainments, where unusual preparations are made at the expense of the daily comfort, and consequently give the effect of exceptional effort. The salon had lately been rehung in gold-colored silk with carmelite touches. Madame's bedroom was draped in a fabric of true blue and furnished in a rococo manner. Rabourdin's study had inherited the late hangings of the salon, carefully cleaned, and was adorned by the fine pictures once belonging to Monsieur Leprince. The daughter of the late auctioneer had utilized in her dining-room certain exquisite Turkish rugs which her father had bought at a bargain; panelling them on the walls in ebony, the cost of which has since become exorbitant. Elegant buffets made by Boulle, also purchased by the auctioneer, furnished the sides of the room, at the end of which sparkled the brass arabesques inlaid in tortoise-shell of the first tall clock that reappeared in the nineteenth century to claim honor for the masterpieces of the seventeenth. Flowers perfumed these rooms so full of good taste and of

exquisite things, where each detail was a work of art well placed and well surrounded, and where Madame Rabourdin, dressed with that natural simplicity which artists alone attain, gave the impression of a woman accustomed to such elegancies, though she never spoke of them, but allowed the charms of her mind to complete the effect produced upon her guests by these delightful surroundings. Thanks to her father, Celestine was able to make society talk of her as soon as the rococo became fashionable.

Accustomed as des Lupeaulx was to false as well as real magnificence in all their stages, he was, nevertheless, surprised at Madame Rabourdin's home. The charm it exercised over this Parisian Asmodeus can be explained by a comparison. A traveller wearied with the rich aspects of Italy, Brazil, or India, returns to his own land and finds on his way a delightful little lake, like the Lac d'Orta at the foot of Monte Rosa, with an island resting on the calm waters, bewitchingly simple; a scene of nature and yet adorned; solitary, but well surrounded with choice plantations and foliage and statues of fine effect. Beyond lies a vista of shores both wild and cultivated; tumultuous grandeur towers above, but in itself all proportions are human. The world that the traveller has lately viewed is here in miniature, modest and pure; his soul, refreshed, bids him remain where a charm of melody and poesy surrounds him with harmony and awakens ideas within his mind. Such a scene represents both life and a monastery.

A few days earlier the beautiful Madame Firmiani, one of the charming women of the faubourg Saint-Germain who visited

and liked Madame Rabourdin, had said to des Lupeaulx (invited expressly to hear this remark), “Why do you not call on Madame – ?” with a motion towards Celestine; “she gives delightful parties, and her dinners, above all, are – better than mine.”

Des Lupeaulx allowed himself to be drawn into an engagement by the handsome Madame Rabourdin, who, for the first time, turned her eyes on him as she spoke. He had, accordingly, gone to the rue Duphot, and that tells the tale. Woman has but one trick, cries Figaro, but that’s infallible. After dining once at the house of this unimportant official, des Lupeaulx made up his mind to dine there often. Thanks to the perfectly proper and becoming advances of the beautiful woman, whom her rival, Madame Colleville, called the Celimene of the rue Duphot, he had dined there every Friday for the last month, and returned of his own accord for a cup of tea on Wednesdays.

Within a few days Madame Rabourdin, having watched him narrowly and knowingly, believed she had found on the secretarial plank a spot where she might safely set her foot. She was no longer doubtful of success. Her inward joy can be realized only in the families of government officials where for three or four years prosperity has been counted on through some appointment, long expected and long sought. How many troubles are to be allayed! how many entreaties and pledges given to the ministerial divinities! how many visits of self-interest paid! At last, thanks to her boldness, Madame Rabourdin heard the hour strike when she was to have twenty thousand francs a year instead

of eight thousand.

"And I shall have managed well," she said to herself. "I have had to make a little outlay; but these are times when hidden merit is overlooked, whereas if a man keeps himself well in sight before the world, cultivates social relations and extends them, he succeeds. After all, ministers and their friends interest themselves only in the people they see; but Rabourdin knows nothing of the world! If I had not cajoled those three deputies they might have wanted La Billardiere's place themselves; whereas, now that I have invited them here, they will be ashamed to do so and will become our supporters instead of rivals. I have rather played the coquette, but – it is delightful that the first nonsense with which one fools a man sufficed."

The day on which a serious and unlooked-for struggle about this appointment began, after a ministerial dinner which preceded one of those receptions which ministers regard as public, des Lupeaulx was standing beside the fireplace near the minister's wife. While taking his coffee he once more included Madame Rabourdin among the seven or eight really superior women in Paris. Several times already he had staked Madame Rabourdin very much as Corporal Trim staked his cap.

"Don't say that too often, my dear friend, or you will injure her," said the minister's wife, half-laughing.

Women never like to hear the praise of other women; they keep silence themselves to lessen its effect.

"Poor La Billardiere is dying," remarked his Excellency the

minister; “that place falls to Rabourdin, one of our most able men, and to whom our predecessors did not behave well, though one of them actually owed his position in the prefecture of police under the Empire to a certain great personage who was interested in Rabourdin. But, my dear friend, you are still young enough to be loved by a pretty woman for yourself – ”

“If La Billardiere’s place is given to Rabourdin I may be believed when I praise the superiority of his wife,” replied des Lupeaulx, piqued by the minister’s sarcasm; “but if Madame la Comtesse would be willing to judge for herself – ”

“You want me to invite her to my next ball, don’t you? Your clever woman will meet a knot of other women who only come here to laugh at us, and when they hear ‘Madame Rabourdin’ announced – ”

“But Madame Firmiani is announced at the Foreign Office parties?”

“Ah, but she was born a Cadignan!” said the newly created count, with a savage look at his general-secretary, for neither he nor his wife were noble.

The persons present thought important matters were being talked over, and the solicitors for favors and appointments kept at a little distance. When des Lupeaulx left the room the countess said to her husband, “I think des Lupeaulx is in love.”

“For the first time in his life, then,” he replied, shrugging his shoulders, as much as to inform his wife that des Lupeaulx did not concern himself with such nonsense.

Just then the minister saw a deputy of the Right Centre enter the room, and he left his wife abruptly to cajole an undecided vote. But the deputy, under the blow of a sudden and unexpected disaster, wanted to make sure of a protector and he had come to announce privately that in a few days he should be compelled to resign. Thus forewarned, the minister would be able to open his batteries for the new election before those of the opposition.

The minister, or to speak correctly, des Lupeaulx had invited to dinner on this occasion one of those irremovable officials who, as we have said, are to be found in every ministry; an individual much embarrassed by his own person, who, in his desire to maintain a dignified appearance, was standing erect and rigid on his two legs, held well together like the Greek hermae. This functionary waited near the fireplace to thank the secretary, whose abrupt and unexpected departure from the room disconcerted him at the moment when he was about to turn a compliment. This official was the cashier of the ministry, the only clerk who did not tremble when the government changed hands.

At the time of which we write, the Chamber did not meddle shabbily with the budget, as it does in the deplorable days in which we now live; it did not contemptibly reduce ministerial emoluments, nor save, as they say in the kitchen, the candle-ends; on the contrary, it granted to each minister taking charge of a public department an indemnity, called an "outfit." It costs, alas, as much to enter on the duties of a minister as to

retire from them; indeed, the entrance involves expenses of all kinds which it is quite impossible to inventory. This indemnity amounted to the pretty little sum of twenty-five thousand francs. When the appointment of a new minister was gazetted in the "Moniteur," and the greater or lesser officials, clustering round the stoves or before the fireplaces and shaking in their shoes, asked themselves: "What will he do? will he increase the number of clerks? will he dismiss two to make room for three?" the cashier tranquilly took out twenty-five clean bank-bills and pinned them together with a satisfied expression on his beadle face. The next day he mounted the private staircase and had himself ushered into the minister's presence by the lackeys, who considered the money and the keeper of money, the contents and the container, the idea and the form, as one and the same power. The cashier caught the ministerial pair at the dawn of official delight, when the newly appointed statesman is benign and affable. To the minister's inquiry as to what brings him there, he replies with the bank-notes, – informing his Excellency that he hastens to pay him the customary indemnity. Moreover, he explains the matter to the minister's wife, who never fails to draw freely upon the fund, and sometimes takes all, for the "outfit" is looked upon as a household affair. The cashier then proceeds to turn a compliment, and to slip in a few politic phrases: "If his Excellency would deign to retain him; if, satisfied with his purely mechanical services, he would," etc. As a man who brings twenty-five thousand francs is always a worthy official,

the cashier is sure not to leave without his confirmation to the post from which he has seen a succession of ministers come and go during a period of, perhaps, twenty-five years. His next step is to place himself at the orders of Madame; he brings the monthly thirteen thousand francs whenever wanted; he advances or delays the payment as requested, and thus manages to obtain, as they said in the monasteries, a voice in the chapter.

Formerly book-keeper at the Treasury, when that establishment kept its books by double entry, the Sieur Saillard was compensated for the loss of that position by his appointment as cashier of a ministry. He was a bulky, fat man, very strong in the matter of book-keeping, and very weak in everything else; round as a round O, simple as how-do-you-do, – a man who came to his office with measured steps, like those of an elephant, and returned with the same measured tread to the place Royale, where he lived on the ground-floor of an old mansion belonging to him. He usually had a companion on the way in the person of Monsieur Isidore Baudoyer, head of a bureau in Monsieur de la Billardiere's division, consequently one of Rabourdin's colleagues. Baudoyer was married to Elisabeth Saillard, the cashier's only daughter, and had hired, very naturally, the apartments above those of his father-in-law. No one at the ministry had the slightest doubt that Saillard was a blockhead, but neither had any one ever found out how far his stupidity could go; it was too compact to be examined; it did not ring hollow; it absorbed everything and gave nothing out. Bixiou (a clerk of

whom more anon) caricatured the cashier by drawing a head in a wig at the top of an egg, and two little legs at the other end, with this inscription: “Born to pay out and take in without blundering. A little less luck, and he might have been lackey to the bank of France; a little more ambition, and he could have been honorably discharged.”

At the moment of which we are now writing, the minister was looking at his cashier very much as we gaze at a window or a cornice, without supposing that either can hear us, or fathom our secret thoughts.

“I am all the more anxious that we should settle everything with the prefect in the quietest way, because des Lupeaulx has designs upon the place for himself,” said the minister, continuing his talk with the deputy; “his paltry little estate is in your arrondissement; we won’t want him as deputy.”

“He has neither years nor rentals enough to be eligible,” said the deputy.

“That may be; but you know how it was decided for Casimir Perier as to age; and as to worldly possessions, des Lupeaulx does possess something, – not much, it is true, but the law does not take into account increase, which he may very well obtain; commissions have wide margins for the deputies of the Centre, you know, and we cannot openly oppose the good-will that is shown to this dear friend.”

“But where would he get the money?”

“How did Manuel manage to become the owner of a house in

Paris?" cried the minister.

The cashier listened and heard, but reluctantly and against his will. These rapid remarks, murmured as they were, struck his ear by one of those acoustic rebounds which are very little studied. As he heard these political confidences, however, a keen alarm took possession of his soul. He was one of those simple-minded beings, who are shocked at listening to anything they are not intended to hear, or entering where they are not invited, and seeming bold when they are really timid, inquisitive where they are truly discreet. The cashier accordingly began to glide along the carpet and edge himself away, so that the minister saw him at a distance when he first took notice of him. Saillard was a ministerial henchman absolutely incapable of indiscretion; even if the minister had known that he had overheard a secret he had only to whisper "motus" in his ear to be sure it was perfectly safe. The cashier, however, took advantage of an influx of office-seekers, to slip out and get into his hackney-coach (hired by the hour for these costly entertainments), and to return to his home in the place Royale.

CHAPTER III. THE TEREDOS NAVALIS, OTHERWISE CALLED SHIP-WORM

While old Saillard was driving across Paris his son-in-law, Isidore Baudoyer, and his daughter, Elisabeth, Baudoyer's wife, were playing a virtuous game of boston with their confessor, the Abbe Gaudron, in company with a few neighbors and a certain Martin Falleix, a brass-founder in the fauborg Saint-Antoine, to whom Saillard had loaned the necessary money to establish a business. This Falleix, a respectable Auvergnat who had come to seek his fortune in Paris with his smelting-pot on his back, had found immediate employment with the firm of Brezac, collectors of metals and other relics from all chateaux in the provinces. About twenty-seven years of age, and spoiled, like others, by success, Martin Falleix had had the luck to become the active agent of Monsieur Saillard, the sleeping-partner in the working out of a discovery made by Falleix in smelting (patent of invention and gold medal granted at the exposition of 1825). Madame Baudoyer, whose only daughter was treading – to use an expression of old Saillard's – on the tail of her twelve years, laid claim to Falleix, a thickset, swarthy, active young fellow, of shrewd principles, whose education she was superintending. The said education, according to her ideas, consisted in teaching him

to play boston, to hold his cards properly, and not to let others see his game; to shave himself regularly before he came to the house, and to wash his hands with good cleansing soap; not to swear, to speak her kind of French, to wear boots instead of shoes, cotton shirts instead of sacking, and to brush up his hair instead of plastering it flat. During the preceding week Elisabeth had finally succeeded in persuading Falleix to give up wearing a pair of enormous flat earrings resembling hoops.

"You go too far, Madame Baudoyer," he said, seeing her satisfaction at the final sacrifice; "you order me about too much. You make me clean my teeth, which loosens them; presently you will want me to brush my nails and curl my hair, which won't do at all in our business; we don't like dandies."

Elisabeth Baudoyer, nee Saillard, is one of those persons who escape portraiture through their utter commonness; yet who ought to be sketched, because they are specimens of that second-rate Parisian bourgeoisie which occupies a place above the well-to-do artisan and below the upper middle classes, – a tribe whose virtues are well-nigh vices, whose defects are never kindly, but whose habits and manners, dull and insipid though they be, are not without a certain originality. Something pinched and puny about Elisabeth Saillard was painful to the eye. Her figure, scarcely over four feet in height, was so thin that the waist measured less than twenty inches. Her small features, which clustered close about the nose, gave her face a vague resemblance to a weasel's snout. Though she was past thirty

years old she looked scarcely more than sixteen. Her eyes, of porcelain blue, overweighted by heavy eyelids which fell nearly straight from the arch of the eyebrows, had little light in them. Everything about her appearance was commonplace: witness her flaxen hair, tending to whiteness; her flat forehead, from which the light did not reflect; and her dull complexion, with gray, almost leaden, tones. The lower part of the face, more triangular than oval, ended irregularly the otherwise irregular outline of her face. Her voice had a rather pretty range of intonation, from sharp to sweet. Elisabeth was a perfect specimen of the second-rate little bourgeoisie who lectures her husband behind the curtains; obtains no credit for her virtues; is ambitious without intelligent object, and solely through the development of her domestic selfishness. Had she lived in the country she would have bought up adjacent land; being, as she was, connected with the administration, she was determined to push her way. If we relate the life of her father and mother, we shall show the sort of woman she was by a picture of her childhood and youth.

Monsieur Saillard married the daughter of an upholsterer keeping shop under the arcades of the Market. Limited means compelled Monsieur and Madame Saillard at their start in life to bear constant privation. After thirty-three years of married life, and twenty-nine years of toil in a government office, the property of "the Saillards" – their circle of acquaintance called them so – consisted of sixty thousand francs entrusted to Falleix, the house in the place Royale, bought for forty thousand in 1804,

and thirty-six thousand francs given in dowry to their daughter Elisabeth. Out of this capital about fifty thousand came to them by the will of the widow Bidault, Madame Saillard's mother. Saillard's salary from the government had always been four thousand five hundred francs a year, and no more; his situation was a blind alley that led nowhere, and had tempted no one to supersede him. Those ninety thousand francs, put together sou by sou, were the fruit therefore of a sordid economy unintelligently employed. In fact, the Saillards did not know how better to manage their savings than to carry them, five thousand francs at a time, to their notary, Monsieur Sorbier, Cardot's predecessor, and let him invest them at five per cent in first mortgages, with the wife's rights reserved in case the borrower was married! In 1804 Madame Saillard obtained a government office for the sale of stamped papers, a circumstance which brought a servant into the household for the first time. At the time of which we write, the house, which was worth a hundred thousand francs, brought in a rental of eight thousand. Falleix paid seven per cent for the sixty thousand invested in the foundry, besides an equal division of profits. The Saillards were therefore enjoying an income of not less than seventeen thousand francs a year. The whole ambition of the good man now centred on obtaining the cross of the Legion and his retiring pension.

Elisabeth, the only child, had toiled steadily from infancy in a home where the customs of life were rigid and the ideas simple. A new hat for Saillard was a matter of deliberation; the time

a coat could last was estimated and discussed; umbrellas were carefully hung up by means of a brass buckle. Since 1804 no repairs of any kind had been done to the house. The Saillards kept the ground-floor in precisely the state in which their predecessor left it. The gilding of the pier-glasses was rubbed off; the paint on the cornices was hardly visible through the layers of dust that time had collected. The fine large rooms still retained certain sculptured marble mantel-pieces and ceilings, worthy of Versailles, together with the old furniture of the widow Bidault. The latter consisted of a curious mixture of walnut armchairs, disjointed, and covered with tapestry; rosewood bureaus; round tables on single pedestals, with brass railings and cracked marble tops; one superb Boulle secretary, the value of which style had not yet been recognized; in short, a chaos of bargains picked up by the worthy widow, – pictures bought for the sake of the frames, china services of a composite order; to wit, a magnificent Japanese dessert set, and all the rest porcelains of various makes, unmatched silver plate, old glass, fine damask, and a four-post bedstead, hung with curtains and garnished with plumes.

Amid these curious relics, Madame Saillard always sat on a sofa of modern mahogany, near a fireplace full of ashes and without fire, on the mantel-shelf of which stood a clock, some antique bronzes, candelabra with paper flowers but no candles, for the careful housewife lighted the room with a tall tallow candle always guttering down into the flat brass candlestick which held it. Madame Saillard's face, despite its

wrinkles, was expressive of obstinacy and severity, narrowness of ideas, an uprightness that might be called quadrangular, a religion without piety, straightforward, candid avarice, and the peace of a quiet conscience. You may see in certain Flemish pictures the wives of burgomasters cut out by nature on the same pattern and wonderfully reproduced on canvas; but these dames wear fine robes of velvet and precious stuffs, whereas Madame Saillard possessed no robes, only that venerable garment called in Touraine and Picardy "cottes," elsewhere petticoats, or skirts pleated behind and on each side, with other skirts hanging over them. Her bust was inclosed in what was called a "casaquin," another obsolete name for a short gown or jacket. She continued to wear a cap with starched wings, and shoes with high heels. Though she was now fifty-seven years old, and her lifetime of vigorous household work ought now to be rewarded with well-earned repose, she was incessantly employed in knitting her husband's stockings and her own, and those of an uncle, just as her countrywomen knit them, moving about the room, talking, pacing up and down the garden, or looking round the kitchen to watch what was going on.

The Saillard's avarice, which was really imposed on them in the first instance by dire necessity, was now a second nature. When the cashier got back from the office, he laid aside his coat, and went to work in the large garden, shut off from the courtyard by an iron railing, and which the family reserved to itself. For years Elisabeth, the daughter, went to market every morning with

her mother, and the two did all the work of the house. The mother cooked well, especially a duck with turnips; but, according to Saillard, no one could equal Elisabeth in hashing the remains of a leg of mutton with onions. "You might eat your boots with those onions and not know it," he remarked. As soon as Elisabeth knew how to hold a needle, her mother had her mend the household linen and her father's coats. Always at work, like a servant, she never went out alone. Though living close by the boulevard du Temple, where Franconi, La Gaite, and l'Ambigu-Comique were within a stone's throw, and, further on, the Porte-Saint-Martin, Elisabeth had never seen a comedy. When she asked to "see what it was like" (with the Abbe Gaudron's permission, be it understood), Monsieur Baudoyer took her – for the glory of the thing, and to show her the finest that was to be seen – to the Opera, where they were playing "The Chinese Laborer." Elisabeth thought "the comedy" as wearisome as the plague of flies, and never wished to see another. On Sundays, after walking four times to and fro between the place Royale and Saint-Paul's church (for her mother made her practise the precepts and the duties of religion), her parents took her to the pavement in front of the Cafe Ture, where they sat on chairs placed between a railing and the wall. The Saillards always made haste to reach the place early so as to choose the best seats, and found much entertainment in watching the passers-by. In those days the Cafe Ture was the rendezvous of the fashionable society of the Marais, the faubourg Saint-Antoine, and the circumjacent regions.

Elisabeth never wore anything but cotton gowns in summer and merino in the winter, which she made herself. Her mother gave her twenty francs a month for her expenses, but her father, who was very fond of her, mitigated this rigorous treatment with a few presents. She never read what the Abbe Gaudron, vicar of Saint-Paul's and the family director, called profane books. This discipline had borne fruit. Forced to employ her feelings on some passion or other, Elisabeth became eager after gain. Though she was not lacking in sense or perspicacity, religious theories, and her complete ignorance of higher emotions had encircled all her faculties with an iron hand; they were exercised solely on the commonest things of life; spent in a few directions they were able to concentrate themselves on a matter in hand. Repressed by religious devotion, her natural intelligence exercised itself within the limits marked out by cases of conscience, which form a mine of subtleties among which self-interest selects its subterfuges. Like those saintly personages in whom religion does not stifle ambition, Elisabeth was capable of requiring others to do a blamable action that she might reap the fruits; and she would have been, like them again, implacable as to her dues and dissembling in her actions. Once offended, she watched her adversaries with the perfidious patience of a cat, and was capable of bringing about some cold and complete vengeance, and then laying it to the account of God. Until her marriage the Saillards lived without other society than that of the Abbe Gaudron, a priest from Auvergne appointed vicar of Saint-Paul's after the restoration of

Catholic worship. Besides this ecclesiastic, who was a friend of the late Madame Bidault, a paternal uncle of Madame Saillard, an old paper-dealer retired from business ever since the year II. of the Republic, and now sixty-nine years old, came to see them on Sundays only, because on that day no government business went on.

This little old man, with a livid face blazoned by the red nose of a tippler and lighted by two gleaming vulture eyes, allowed his gray hair to hang loose under a three-cornered hat, wore breeches with straps that extended beyond the buckles, cotton stockings of mottled thread knitted by his niece, whom he always called "the little Saillard," stout shoes with silver buckles, and a surtout coat of mixed colors. He looked very much like those verger-beadle-bell-ringing-grave-digging-parish-clerks who are taken to be caricatures until we see them performing their various functions. On the present occasion he had come on foot to dine with the Saillards, intending to return in the same way to the rue Greneta, where he lived on the third floor of an old house. His business was that of discounting commercial paper in the quartier Saint-Martin, where he was known by the nickname of "Gigonnet," from the nervous convulsive movement with which he lifted his legs in walking, like a cat. Monsieur Bidault began this business in the year II. in partnership with a dutchman named Werbrust, a friend of Gobseck.

Some time later Saillard made the acquaintance of Monsieur and Madame Transon, wholesale dealers in pottery, with an

establishment in the rue de Lesdiguieres, who took an interest in Elisabeth and introduced young Isadore Baudoyer to the family with the intention of marrying her. Gigonnet approved of the match, for he had long employed a certain Mitral, uncle of the young man, as clerk. Monsieur and Madame Baudoyer, father and mother of Isidore, highly respected leather-dressers in the rue Censier, had slowly made a moderate fortune out of a small trade. After marrying their only son, on whom they settled fifty thousand francs, they determined to live in the country, and had lately removed to the neighborhood of Ile-d'Adam, where after a time they were joined by Mitral. They frequently came to Paris, however, where they kept a corner in the house in the rue Censier which they gave to Isidore on his marriage. The elder Baudoyers had an income of about three thousand francs left to live upon after establishing their son.

Mitral was a being with a sinister wig, a face the color of Seine water, lighted by a pair of Spanish-tobacco-colored eyes, cold as a well-rope, always smelling a rat, and close-mouthed about his property. He probably made his fortune in his own hole and corner, just as Werbrust and Gigonnet made theirs in the quartier Saint-Martin.

Though the Saillards' circle of acquaintance increased, neither their ideas nor their manners and customs changed. The saint's-days of father, mother, daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild were carefully observed, also the anniversaries of birth and marriage, Easter, Christmas, New Year's day, and Epiphany.

These festivals were preceded by great domestic sweepings and a universal clearing up of the house, which added an element of usefulness to the ceremonies. When the festival day came, the presents were offered with much pomp and an accompaniment of flowers, – silk stockings or a fur cap for old Saillard; gold earrings and articles of plate for Elisabeth or her husband, for whom, little by little, the parents were accumulating a whole silver service; silk petticoats for Madame Saillard, who laid the stuff by and never made it up. The recipient of these gifts was placed in an armchair and asked by those present for a certain length of time, "Guess what we have for you!" Then came a splendid dinner, lasting at least five hours, to which were invited the Abbe Gaudron, Falleix, Rabourdin, Monsieur Godard, under-head-clerk to Monsieur Baudoyer, Monsieur Bataille, captain of the company of the National Guard to which Saillard and his son-in-law belonged. Monsieur Cardot, who was invariably asked, did as Rabourdin did, namely, accepted one invitation out of six. The company sang at dessert, shook hands and embraced with enthusiasm, wishing each other all manner of happiness; the presents were exhibited and the opinion of the guests asked about them. The day Saillard received his fur cap he wore it during the dessert, to the satisfaction of all present. At night, mere ordinary acquaintances were bidden, and dancing went on till very late, formerly to the music of one violin, but for the last six years Monsieur Godard, who was a great flute player, contributed the piercing tones of a flageolet to the festivity. The

cook, Madame Baudoyer's nurse, and old Catherine, Madame Saillard's woman-servant, together with the porter or his wife, stood looking on at the door of the salon. The servants always received three francs on these occasions to buy themselves wine or coffee.

This little circle looked upon Saillard and Baudoyer as transcendent beings; they were government officers; they had risen by their own merits; they worked, it was said, with the minister himself; they owed their fortune to their talents; they were politicians. Baudoyer was considered the more able of the two; his position as head of a bureau presupposed labor that was more intricate and arduous than that of a cashier. Moreover, Isidore, though the son of a leather-dresser, had had the genius to study and to cast aside his father's business and find a career in politics, which had led him to a post of eminence. In short, silent and uncommunicative as he was, he was looked upon as a deep thinker, and perhaps, said the admiring circle, he would some day become deputy of the eighth arrondissement. As Gigonnet listened to such remarks as these, he pressed his already pinched lips closer together, and threw a glance at his great-niece, Elisabeth.

In person, Isidore was a tall, stout man of thirty-seven, who perspired freely, and whose head looked as if he had water on the brain. This enormous head, covered with chestnut hair cropped close, was joined to the neck by rolls of flesh which overhung the collar of his coat. He had the arms of Hercules, hands worthy of

Domitian, a stomach which sobriety held within the limits of the majestic, to use a saying of Brillaet-Savarin. His face was a good deal like that of the Emperor Alexander. The Tartar type was in the little eyes and the flattened nose turned slightly up, in the frigid lips and the short chin. The forehead was low and narrow. Though his temperament was lymphatic, the devout Isidore was under the influence of a conjugal passion which time did not lessen.

In spite, however, of his resemblance to the handsome Russian Emperor and the terrible Domitian, Isidore Baudoyer was nothing more than a political office-holder, of little ability as head of his department, a cut-and-dried routine man, who concealed the fact that he was a flabby cipher by so ponderous a personality that no scalpel could cut deep enough to let the operator see into him. His severe studies, in which he had shown the patience and sagacity of an ox, and his square head, deceived his parents, who firmly believed him an extraordinary man. Pedantic and hypercritical, meddlesome and fault-finding, he was a terror to the clerks under him, whom he worried in their work, enforcing the rules rigorously, and arriving himself with such terrible punctuality that not one of them dared to be a moment late. Baudoyer wore a blue coat with gilt buttons, a chamois waistcoat, gray trousers and cravats of various colors. His feet were large and ill-shod. From the chain of his watch depended an enormous bunch of old trinkets, among which in 1824 he still wore “American beads,” which were very much the

fashion in the year VII.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.