HONORÉ DE BALZAC

RISE AND FALL OF CESAR BIROTTEAU

Оноре де Бальзак

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де Бальзак О.

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Содержание

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PART I. CESAR AT HIS APOGEE

I

During winter nights noise never ceases in the Rue Saint-Honore except for a short interval. Kitchen-gardeners carrying their produce to market continue the stir of carriages returning from theatres and balls. Near the middle of this sustained pause in the grand symphony of Parisian uproar, which occurs about one o'clock in the morning, the wife of Monsieur Cesar Birotteau, a perfumer established near the Place Vendome, was startled from her sleep by a frightful dream. She had seen her double. She had appeared to herself clothed in rags, turning with a shrivelled, withered hand the latch of her own shop-door, seeming to be at the threshold, yet at the same time seated in her armchair behind the counter. She was asking alms of herself, and heard herself speaking from the doorway and also from her seat at the desk.

She tried to grasp her husband, but her hand fell on a cold place. Her terror became so intense that she could not move her neck, which stiffened as if petrified; the membranes of her throat became glued together, her voice failed her. She remained sitting erect in the same posture in the middle of the alcove, both panels of which were wide open, her eyes staring and fixed, her hair quivering, her ears filled with strange noises, her heart tightened yet palpitating, and her person bathed in perspiration though chilled to the bone.

Fear is a half-diseased sentiment, which presses so violently upon the human mechanism that the faculties are suddenly excited to the highest degree of their power or driven to utter disorganization. Physiologists have long wondered at this phenomenon, which overturns their systems and upsets all theories; it is in fact a thunderbolt working within the being, and, like all electric accidents, capricious and whimsical in its course. This explanation will become a mere commonplace in the day when scientific men are brought to recognize the immense part which electricity plays in human thought.

Madame Birotteau now passed through several of the shocks, in some sort electrical, which are produced by terrible explosions of the will forced out, or held under, by some mysterious mechanism. Thus during a period of time, very short if judged by a watch, but immeasurable when calculated by the rapidity of her impressions, the poor woman had the supernatural power of emitting more ideas and bringing to the surface more recollections than, under any ordinary use of her faculties, she could put forth in the course of a whole day. The poignant tale of her monologue may be abridged into a few absurd sentences, as contradictory and bare of meaning as the monologue itself.

"There is no reason why Birotteau should leave my bed! He has eaten so much veal that he may be ill. But if he were ill he would have waked me. For nineteen years that we have slept together in this bed, in this house, it has never happened that he left his place without telling me, – poor sheep! He never slept away except to pass the night in the guard-room. Did he come to bed to-night? Why, of course; goodness! how stupid I am."

She cast her eyes upon the bed and saw her husband's night-cap, which still retained the almost conical shape of his head.

"Can he be dead? Has he killed himself? Why?" she went on. "For the last two years, since they made him deputy-mayor, he is *all-I-don't-know-how*. To put him into public life! On the word of an honest woman, isn't it pitiable? His business is doing well, for he gave me a shawl. But perhaps

it isn't doing well? Bah! I should know of it. Does one ever know what a man has got in his head; or a woman either? – there is no harm in that. Didn't we sell five thousand francs' worth to-day? Besides, a deputy mayor couldn't kill himself; he knows the laws too well. Where is he then?"

She could neither turn her neck, nor stretch out her hand to pull the bell, which would have put in motion a cook, three clerks, and a shop-boy. A prey to the nightmare, which still lasted though her mind was wide awake, she forgot her daughter peacefully asleep in an adjoining room, the door of which opened at the foot of her bed. At last she cried "Birotteau!" but got no answer. She thought she had called the name aloud, though in fact she had only uttered it mentally.

"Has he a mistress? He is too stupid," she added. "Besides, he loves me too well for that. Didn't he tell Madame Roguin that he had never been unfaithful to me, even in thought? He is virtue upon earth, that man. If any one ever deserved paradise he does. What does he accuse himself of to his confessor, I wonder? He must tell him a lot of fiddle-faddle. Royalist as he is, though he doesn't know why, he can't froth up his religion. Poor dear cat! he creeps to Mass at eight o'clock as slyly as if he were going to a bad house. He fears God for God's sake; hell is nothing to him. How could he have a mistress? He is so tied to my petticoat that he bores me. He loves me better than his own eyes; he would put them out for my sake. For nineteen years he has never said to me one word louder than another. His daughter is never considered before me. But Cesarine is here – Cesarine! Cesarine! – Birotteau has never had a thought which he did not tell me. He was right enough when he declared to me at the Petit-Matelot that I should never know him till I tried him. And *not here*! It is extraordinary!"

She turned her head with difficulty and glanced furtively about the room, then filled with those picturesque effects which are the despair of language and seem to belong exclusively to the painters of genre. What words can picture the alarming zig-zags produced by falling shadows, the fantastic appearance of curtains bulged out by the wind, the flicker of uncertain light thrown by a night-lamp upon the folds of red calico, the rays shed from a curtain-holder whose lurid centre was like the eye of a burglar, the apparition of a kneeling dress, – in short, all the grotesque effects which terrify the imagination at a moment when it has no power except to foresee misfortunes and exaggerate them? Madame Birotteau suddenly saw a strong light in the room beyond her chamber, and thought of fire; but perceiving a red foulard which looked like a pool of blood, her mind turned exclusively to burglars, especially when she thought she saw traces of a struggle in the way the furniture stood about the room. Recollecting the sum of money which was in the desk, a generous fear put an end to the chill ferment of her nightmare. She sprang terrified, and in her night-gown, into the very centre of the room to help her husband, whom she supposed to be in the grasp of assassins.

"Birotteau! Birotteau!" she cried at last in a voice full of anguish.

She then saw the perfumer in the middle of the next room, a yard-stick in his hand measuring the air, and so ill wrapped up in his green cotton dressing-gown with chocolate-colored spots that the cold had reddened his legs without his feeling it, preoccupied as he was. When Cesar turned about to say to his wife, "Well, what do you want, Constance?" his air and manner, like those of a man absorbed in calculations, were so prodigiously silly that Madame Birotteau began to laugh.

"Goodness! Cesar, if you are not an oddity like that!" she said. "Why did you leave me alone without telling me? I have nearly died of terror; I did not know what to imagine. What are you doing there, flying open to all the winds? You'll get as hoarse as a wolf. Do you hear me, Birotteau?"

"Yes, wife, here I am," answered the perfumer, coming into the bedroom.

"Come and warm yourself, and tell me what maggot you've got in your head," replied Madame Birotteau opening the ashes of the fire, which she hastened to relight. "I am frozen. What a goose I was to get up in my night-gown! But I really thought they were assassinating you."

The shopkeeper put his candlestick on the chimney-piece, wrapped his dressing-gown closer about him, and went mechanically to find a flannel petticoat for his wife.

"Here, Mimi, cover yourself up," he said. "Twenty-two by eighteen," he resumed, going on with his monologue; "we can get a superb salon."

"Ah, ca! Birotteau, are you on the high road to insanity? Are you dreaming?"

"No, wife, I am calculating."

"You had better wait till daylight for your nonsense," she cried, fastening the petticoat beneath her short night-gown and going to the door of the room where her daughter was in bed.

"Cesarine is asleep," she said, "she won't hear us. Come, Birotteau, speak up. What is it?"

"We can give a ball."

"Give a ball! we? On the word of an honest woman, you are dreaming, my friend."

"I am not dreaming, my beautiful white doe. Listen. People should always do what their position in life demands. Government has brought me forward into prominence. I belong to the government; it is my duty to study its mind, and further its intentions by developing them. The Duc de Richelieu has just put an end to the occupation of France by the foreign armies. According to Monsieur de la Billardiere, the functionaries who represent the city of Paris should make it their duty, each in his own sphere of influence, to celebrate the liberation of our territory. Let us show a true patriotism which shall put these liberals, these damned intriguers, to the blush; hein? Do you think I don't love my country? I wish to show the liberals, my enemies, that to love the king is to love France."

"Do you think you have got any enemies, my poor Birotteau?"

"Why, yes, wife, we have enemies. Half our friends in the quarter are our enemies. They all say, 'Birotteau has had luck; Birotteau is a man who came from nothing: yet here he is deputy-mayor; everything succeeds with him.' Well, they are going to be finely surprised. You are the first to be told that I am made a chevalier of the Legion of honor. The king signed the order yesterday."

"Oh! then," said Madame Birotteau, much moved, "of course we must give the ball, my good friend. But what have you done to merit the cross?"

"Yesterday, when Monsieur de la Billardiere told me the news," said Birotteau, modestly, "I asked myself, as you do, what claims I had to it; but I ended by seeing what they were, and in approving the action of the government. In the first place, I am a royalist; I was wounded at Saint-Roch in Vendemiaire: isn't it something to have borne arms in those days for the good cause? Then, according to the merchants, I exercised my judicial functions in a way to give general satisfaction. I am now deputy-mayor. The king grants four crosses to the municipality of Paris; the prefect, selecting among the deputies suitable persons to be thus decorated, has placed my name first on the list. The king moreover knows me: thanks to old Ragon. I furnish him with the only powder he is willing to use; we alone possess the receipt of the late queen, – poor, dear, august victim! The mayor vehemently supported me. So there it is. If the king gives me the cross without my asking for it, it seems to me that I cannot refuse it without failing in my duty to him. Did I seek to be deputy-mayor? So, wife, since we are sailing before the wind, as your uncle Pillerault says when he is jovial, I have decided to put the household on a footing in conformity with our high position. If I can become anything, I'll risk being whatever the good God wills that I shall be, – sub-prefect, if such be my destiny. My wife, you are much mistaken if you think a citizen has paid his debt to his country by merely selling perfumery for twenty years to those who came to buy it. If the State demands the help of our intelligence, we are as much bound to give it as we are to pay the tax on personal property, on windows and doors, *et caetera*. Do you want to stay forever behind your counter? You have been there, thank God, a long time. This ball shall be our fete, – yours and mine. Good-by to economy, – for your sake, be it understood. I burn our sign, 'The Queen of Roses'; I efface the name, 'Cesar Birotteau, Perfumer, Successor to Ragon,' and put simply, 'Perfumery' in big letters of gold. On the *entresol* I place the office, the counting-room, and a pretty little sanctum for you. I make the shop out of the back-shop, the present dining-room, and kitchen. I hire the first floor of the next house, and open a door into it through the wall. I turn the staircase so as to pass from house to house on one floor; and we shall thus get a grand appartement, furnished like a nest. Yes, I shall refurnish your bedroom, and contrive a boudoir for you and a pretty chamber for Cesarine. The shop-girl whom you will hire, our head clerk, and your lady's-maid (yes, Madame, you are to have one!) will sleep on the second floor. On the third

will be the kitchen and rooms of the cook and the man-of-all-work. The fourth shall be a general store-house for bottle, crystals, and porcelains. The workshop for our people, in the attic! Passers-by shall no longer see them gumming on the labels, making the bags, sorting the flasks, and corking the phials. Very well for the Rue Saint-Denis, but for the Rue Saint-Honore – fy! bad style! Our shop must be as comfortable as a drawing-room. Tell me, are we the only perfumers who have reached public honors? Are there not vinegar merchants and mustard men who command in the National Guard and are very well received at the Palace? Let us imitate them; let us extend our business, and at the same time press forward into higher society."

"Goodness! Birotteau, do you know what I am thinking of as I listen to you? You are like the man who looks for knots in a bulrush. Recollect what I said when it was a question of making you deputy-mayor: 'your peace of mind before everything!' You are as fit, I told you, 'to be put forward in public life as my arm is to turn a windmill. Honors will be your ruin!' You would not listen to me, and now the ruin has come. To play a part in politics you must have money: have we any? What! would you burn your sign, which cost six hundred francs, and renounce 'The Queen of Roses,' your true glory? Leave ambition to others. He who puts his hand in the fire gets burned, – isn't that true? Politics burn in these days. We have one hundred good thousand francs invested outside of our business, our productions, our merchandise. If you want to increase your fortune, do as they did in 1793. The Funds are at sixty-two: buy into the Funds. You will get ten thousand francs' income, and the investment won't hamper our property. Take advantage of the occasion to marry our daughter; sell the business, and let us go and live in your native place. Why! for fifteen years you have talked of nothing but buying Les Tresorieres, that pretty little property near Chinon, where there are woods and fields, and ponds and vineyards, and two dairies, which bring in a thousand crowns a year, with a house which we both like, – all of which we can have for sixty thousand francs; and, lo! Monsieur now wants to become something under government! Recollect what we are, – perfumers. If sixteen years before you invented the DOUBLE PASTE OF SULTANS and the CARMINATIVE BALM some one had said, 'You are going to make enough money to buy Les Tresorieres,' wouldn't you have been half sick with joy? Well, you can acquire that property which you wanted so much that you hardly opened your mouth about anything else, and now you talk of spending on nonsense money earned by the sweat of our brow: I can say ours, for I've sat behind the desk through all that time, like a poor dog in his kennel. Isn't it much better to come and visit our daughter after she is married to a notary of Paris, and live eight months of the year at Chinon, than to begin here to make five sous six blanks, and of six blanks nothing? Wait for a rise in the Funds, and you can give eight thousand francs a year to your daughter and we can keep two thousand for ourselves, and the proceeds of the business will allow us to buy Les Tresorieres. There in your native place, my good little cat, with our furniture, which is worth a great deal, we shall live like princes; whereas here we want at least a million to make any figure at all."

"I expected you to say all this, wife," said Cesar Birotteau. "I am not quite such a fool (though you think me a great fool, you do) as not to have thought of all that. Now, listen to me. Alexandre Crottat will fit us like a glove for a son-in-law, and he will succeed Roguin; but do you suppose he will be satisfied with a hundred thousand francs *dot*? – supposing that we gave our whole property outside of the business to establish our daughter, and I am willing; I would gladly live on dry bread the rest of my days to see her happy as a queen, the wife of a notary of Paris, as you say. Well, then, a hundred thousand francs, or even eight thousand francs a year, is nothing at all towards buying Roguin's practice. Little Xandrot, as we call him, thinks, like all the rest of the world, that we are richer than we are. If his father, that big farmer who is as close as a snail, won't sell a hundred thousand francs worth of land Xandrot can't be a notary, for Roguin's practice is worth four or five hundred thousand. If Crottat does not pay half down, how could he negotiate the affair? Cesarine must have two hundred thousand francs *dot*; and I mean that you and I shall retire solid bourgeois of Paris, with

fifteen thousand francs a year. Hein! If I could make you see that as plain as day, wouldn't it shut your mouth?"

"Oh, if you've got the mines of Peru – "

"Yes, I have, my lamb. Yes," he said, taking his wife by the waist and striking her with little taps, under an emotion of joy which lighted up his features, "I did not wish to tell you of this matter till it was all cooked; but to-morrow it will be done, – that is, perhaps it will. Here it is then: Roguin has proposed a speculation to me, so safe that he has gone into it with Ragon, with your uncle Pillerault, and two other of his clients. We are to buy property near the Madeleine, which, according to Roguin's calculations, we shall get for a quarter of the value which it will bring three years from now, at which time, the present leases having expired, we shall manage it for ourselves. We have all six taken certain shares. I furnish three hundred thousand francs, – that is, three-eighths of the whole. If any one of us wants money, Roguin will get it for him by hypothecating his share. To hold the gridiron and know how the fish are fried, I have chosen to be nominally proprietor of one half, which is, however, to be the common property of Pillerault and the worthy Ragon and myself. Roguin will be, under the name of Monsieur Charles Claparon, co-proprietor with me, and will give a reversionary deed to his associates, as I shall to mine. The deeds of purchase are made by promises of sale under private seal, until we are masters of the whole property. Roguin will investigate as to which of the contracts should be paid in money, for he is not sure that we can dispense with registering and yet turn over the titles to those to whom we sell in small parcels. But it takes too long to explain all this to you. The ground once paid for, we have only to cross our arms and in three years we shall be rich by a million. Cesarine will then be twenty, our business will be sold, and we shall step, by the grace of God, modestly to eminence."

"Where will you get your three hundred thousand francs?" said Madame Birotteau.

"You don't understand business, my beloved little cat. I shall take the hundred thousand francs which are now with Roguin; I shall borrow forty thousand on the buildings and gardens where we now have our manufactory in the Faubourg du Temple; we have twenty thousand francs here in hand, – in all, one hundred and sixty thousand. There remain one hundred and forty thousand more, for which I shall sign notes to the order of Monsieur Charles Claparon, banker. He will pay the value, less the discount. So there are the three hundred thousand francs provided for. He who owns rents owes nothing. When the notes fall due we can pay them off with our profits. If we cannot pay them in cash, Roguin will give the money at five per cent, hypothecated on my share of the property. But such loans will be unnecessary. I have discovered an essence which will make the hair grow – an Oil Comagene, from Syria! Livingston has just set up for me a hydraulic press to manufacture the oil from nuts, which yield it readily under strong pressure. In a year, according to my calculations, I shall have made a hundred thousand francs at least. I meditate an advertisement which shall begin, 'Down with wigs!' – the effect will be prodigious. You have never found out my wakefulness, Madame! For three months the success of Macassar Oil has kept me from sleeping. I am resolved to take the shine out of Macassar!"

"So these are the fine projects you've been rolling in your noddle for two months without choosing to tell me? I have just seen myself begging at my own door, – a warning from heaven! Before long we shall have nothing left but our eyes to weep with. Never while I live shall you do it; do you hear me, Cesar? Underneath all this there is some plot which you don't perceive; you are too upright and loyal to suspect the trickery of others. Why should they come and offer you millions? You are giving up your property, you are going beyond your means; and if your oil doesn't succeed, if you don't make the money, if the value of the land can't be realized, how will you pay your notes? With the shells of your nuts? To rise in society you are going to hide your name, take down your sign, 'The Queen of Roses,' and yet you mean to salaam and bow and scrape in advertisements and prospectuses, which will placard Cesar Birotteau at every corner, and on all the boards, wherever they are building."

"Oh! you are not up to it all. I shall have a branch establishment, under the name of Popinot, in some house near the Rue des Lombards, where I shall put little Anselme. I shall pay my debt of gratitude to Monsieur and Madame Ragon by setting up their nephew, who can make his fortune. The poor Ragonines look to me half-starved of late."

"Bah! all those people want your money."

"But what people, my treasure? Is it your uncle Pillerault, who loves us like the apple of his eye, and dines with us every Sunday? Is it good old Ragon, our predecessor, who has forty upright years in business to boast of, and with whom we play our game of boston? Is it Roguin, a notary, a man fifty-seven years old, twenty-five of which he has been in office? A notary of Paris! he would be the flower of the lot, if honest folk were not all worth the same price. If necessary, my associates will help me. Where is the plot, my white doe? Look here, I must tell you your defect. On the word of an honest man it lies on my heart. You are as suspicious as a cat. As soon as we had two sous worth in the shop you thought the customers were all thieves. I had to go down on my knees to you to let me make you rich. For a Parisian girl you have no ambition! If it hadn't been for your perpetual fears, no man could have been happier than I. If I had listened to you I should never have invented the Paste of Sultans nor the Carminative Balm. Our shop has given us a living, but these two discoveries have made the hundred and sixty thousand francs which we possess, net and clear! Without my genius, for I certainly have talent as a perfumer, we should now be petty retail shopkeepers, pulling the devil's tail to make both ends meet. I shouldn't be a distinguished merchant, competing in the election of judges for the department of commerce; I should be neither a judge nor a deputy-mayor. Do you know what I should be? A shopkeeper like Pere Ragon, – be it said without offence, for I respect shopkeeping; the best of our kidney are in it. After selling perfumery like him for forty years, we should be worth three thousand francs a year; and at the price things are now, for they have doubled in value, we should, like them, have barely enough to live on. (Day after day that poor household wrings my heart more and more. I must know more about it, and I'll get the truth from Popinot to-morrow!) If I had followed your advice – you who have such uneasy happiness and are always asking whether you will have to-morrow what you have got to-day – I should have no credit, I should have no cross of the Legion of honor. I should not be on the highroad to becoming a political personage. Yes, you may shake your head, but if our affair succeeds I may become deputy of Paris. Ah! I am not named Cesar for nothing; I succeed. It is unimaginable! outside every one credits me with capacity, but here the only person whom I want so much to please that I sweat blood and water to make her happy, is precisely the one who takes me for a fool."

These phrases, divided by eloquent pauses and delivered like shot, after the manner of those who recriminate, expressed so deep and constant an attachment that Madame Birotteau was inwardly touched, though, like all women, she made use of the love she inspired to gain her end.

"Well! Birotteau," she said, "if you love me, let me be happy in my own way. Neither you nor I have education; we don't know how to talk, nor to play 'your obedient servant' like men of the world; how then do you expect that we could succeed in government places? I shall be happy at Les Tresorieres, indeed I shall. I have always loved birds and animals, and I can pass my life very well taking care of the hens and the farm. Let us sell the business, marry Cesarine, and give up your visions. We can come and pass the winters in Paris with our son-in-law; we shall be happy; nothing in politics or commerce can then change our way of life. Why do you want to crush others? Isn't our present fortune enough for us? When you are a millionaire can you eat two dinners; will you want two wives? Look at my uncle Pillerault! He is wisely content with his little property, and spends his life in good deeds. Does he want fine furniture? Not he! I know very well you have been ordering furniture for me; I saw Braschon here, and it was not to buy perfumery."

"Well, my beauty, yes! Your furniture is ordered; our improvements begin to-morrow, and are superintended by an architect recommended to me by Monsieur de la Billardiere."

"My God!" she cried, "have pity upon us!"

"But you are not reasonable, my love. Do you think that at thirty-seven years of age, fresh and pretty as you are, you can go and bury yourself at Chinon? I, thank God, am only thirty-nine. Chance opens to me a fine career; I enter upon it. If I conduct myself prudently I can make an honorable house among the bourgeoisie of Paris, as was done in former times. I can found the house of Birotteau, like the house of Keller, or Jules Desmartes, or Roguin, Cochin, Guillaume, Lebas, Nucingen, Saillard, Popinot, Matifat, who make their mark, or have made it, in their respective quarters. Come now! If this affair were not as sure as bars of gold – "

"Sure!"

"Yes, sure. For two months I have figured at it. Without seeming to do so, I have been getting information on building from the department of public works, from architects and contractors. Monsieur Grindot, the young architect who is to alter our house, is in despair that he has no money to put into the speculation."

"He hopes for the work; he says that to screw something out of you."

"Can he take in such men as Pillerault, as Charles Claparon, as Roguin? The profit is as sure as that of the Paste of Sultans."

"But, my dear friend, why should Roguin speculate? He gets his commissions, and his fortune is made. I see him pass sometimes more full of care than a minister of state, with an underhand look which I don't like; he hides some secret anxiety. His face has grown in five years to look like that of an old rake. Who can be sure that he won't kick over the traces when he gets all your property into his own hands. Such things happen. Do we know him well? He has only been a friend for fifteen years, and I wouldn't put my hand into the fire for him. Why! he is not decent: he does not live with his wife. He must have mistresses who ruin him; I don't see any other cause for his anxiety. When I am dressing I look through the blinds, and I often see him coming home in the mornings: where from? Nobody knows. He seems to me like a man who has an establishment in town, who spends on his pleasures, and Madame on hers. Is that the life of a notary? If they make fifty thousand francs a year and spend sixty thousand, in twenty years they will get to the end of their property and be as naked as the little Saint John; and then, as they can't do without luxury, they will prey upon their friends without compunction. Charity begins at home. He is intimate with that little scamp du Tillet, our former clerk; and I see nothing good in that friendship. If he doesn't know how to judge du Tillet he must be blind; and if he does know him, why does he pet him? You'll tell me, because his wife is fond of du Tillet. Well, I don't look for any good in a man who has no honor with respect to his wife. Besides, the present owners of that land must be fools to sell for a hundred sous what is worth a hundred francs. If you met a child who did not know the value of a louis, wouldn't you feel bound to tell him of it? Your affair looks to me like a theft, be it said without offence."

"Good God! how queer women are sometimes, and how they mix up ideas! If Roguin were not in this business, you would say to me: 'Look here, Cesar, you are going into a thing without Roguin; therefore it is worth nothing.' But to-day he is in it, as security, and you tell me – "

"No, that is a Monsieur Claparon."

"But a notary cannot put his own name into a speculation."

"Then why is he doing a thing forbidden by law? How do you answer that, you who are guided by law?"

"Let me go on. Roguin is in it, and you tell me the business is worthless. Is that reasonable? You say, 'He is acting against the law.' But he would put himself openly in the business if it were necessary. Can't they say the same of me? Would Ragon and Pillerault come and say to me: 'Why do you have to do with this affair, – you who have made your money as a merchant?'"

"Merchants are not in the same position as notaries," said Madame Birotteau.

"Well, my conscience is clear," said Cesar, continuing; "the people who sell, sell because they must; we do not steal from them any more than you steal from others when you buy their stocks at seventy-five. We buy the ground to-day at to-day's price. In two years it will be another thing; just

so with stocks. Know then, Constance-Barbe-Josephine Pillerault, that you will never catch Cesar Birotteau doing anything against the most rigid honor, nor against the laws, nor against his conscience, nor against delicacy. A man established and known for eighteen years, to be suspected in his own household of dishonesty!"

"Come, be calm, Cesar! A woman who has lived with you all that time knows down to the bottom of your soul. You are the master, after all. You earned your fortune, didn't you? It is yours, and you can spend it. If we are reduced to the last straits of poverty, neither your daughter nor I will make you a single reproach. But, listen; when you invented your Paste of Sultans and Carminative Balm, what did you risk? Five or six thousand francs. To-day you put all your fortune on a game of cards. And you are not the only one to play; you have associates who may be much cleverer than you. Give your ball, remodel the house, spend ten thousand francs if you like, – it is useless but not ruinous. As to your speculations near the Madeleine, I formally object. You are perfumer: be a perfumer, and not a speculator in land. We women have instincts which do not deceive us. I have warned you; now follow your own lead. You have been judge in the department of commerce, you know the laws. So far, you have guided the ship well, Cesar; I shall follow you! But I shall tremble till I see our fortune solidly secure and Cesarine well married. God grant that my dream be not a prophecy!"

This submission thwarted Birotteau, who now employed an innocent ruse to which he had had recourse on similar occasions.

"Listen, Constance. I have not given my word; though it is the same as if I had."

"Oh, Cesar, all is said; let us say no more. Honor before fortune. Come, go to bed, dear friend, there is no more wood. Besides, we shall talk better in bed, if it amuses you. Oh! that horrid dream! My God! to see one's self! it was fearful! Cesarine and I will have to make a pretty number of *neuvaines* for the success of your speculations."

"Doubtless the help of God can do no harm," said Birotteau, gravely. "But the oil in nuts is also powerful, wife. I made this discovery just as I made that of the Double Paste of Sultans, – by chance. The first time by opening a book; this time by looking at an engraving of Hero and Leander: you know, the woman who pours oil on the head of her lover; pretty, isn't it? The safest speculations are those which depend on vanity, on self-love, on the desire of appearing well. Those sentiments never die."

"Alas! I know it well."

"At a certain age men will turn their souls inside out to get hair, if they haven't any. For some time past hair-dressers have told me that they sell not only Macassar, but all the drugs which are said to dye hair or make it grow. Since the peace, men are more with women, and women don't like bald-heads; hey! hey! Mimi? The demand for that article grows out of the political situation. A composition which will keep the hair in good health will sell like bread; all the more if it has the sanction, as it will have, of the Academy of Sciences. My good Monsieur Vauquelin will perhaps help me once more. I shall go to him to-morrow and submit my idea; offering him at the same time that engraving which I have at last found in Germany, after two years' search. He is now engaged in analyzing hair: Chiffreville, his associate in the manufacture of chemical products, told me so. If my discovery should jump with his, my essence will be bought by both sexes. The idea is a fortune; I repeat it. Mon Dieu! I can't sleep. Hey! luckily little Popinot has the finest head of hair in the world. A shop-girl with hair long enough to touch the ground, and who could say – if the thing were possible without offence to God or my neighbor – that the Oil Comagene (for it shall be an oil, decidedly) has had something to do with it, – all the gray-heads in Paris will fling themselves upon the invention like poverty upon the world. Hey! hey! Mignonne! how about the ball? I am not wicked, but I should like to meet that little scamp du Tillet, who swells out with his fortune and avoids me at the Bourse. He knows that I know a thing about him which was not fine. Perhaps I have been too kind to him. Isn't it odd, wife, that we are always punished for our good deeds? – here below, I mean. I behaved like a father to him; you don't know all I did for him."

"You give me goose-flesh merely speaking of it. If you knew what he wished to make of you, you would never have kept the secret of his stealing that three thousand francs, – for I guessed just how the thing was done. If you had sent him to the correctional police, perhaps you would have done a service to a good many people."

"What did he wish to make of me?"

"Nothing. If you were inclined to listen to me to-night, I would give you a piece of good advice, Birotteau; and that is, to let your du Tillet alone."

"Won't it seem strange if I exclude him from my house, – a clerk for whom I endorsed to the amount of twenty thousand francs when he first went into business? Come, let us do good for good's sake. Besides, perhaps du Tillet has mended his ways."

"Everything is to be turned topsy-turvy, then?"

"What do you mean with your topsy-turvy? Everything will be ruled like a sheet of music-paper. Have you forgotten what I have just told you about turning the staircase and hiring the first floor of the next house? – which is all settled with the umbrella-maker, Cayron. He and I are going to-morrow to see his proprietor, Monsieur Molineux. To-morrow I have as much to do as a minister of state."

"You turn my brain with your projects," said Constance. "I am all mixed up. Besides, Birotteau, I'm asleep."

"Good-day," replied the husband. "Just listen; I say good-day because it is morning, Mimi. Ah! there she is off, the dear child. Yes! you shall be rich, *richissime*, or I'll renounce my name of Cesar!"

A few moments later Constance and Cesar were peacefully snoring.

II

A glance rapidly thrown over the past life of this household will strengthen the ideas which ought to have been suggested by the friendly altercation of the two personages in this scene. While picturing the manners and customs of retail shopkeepers, this sketch will also show by what singular chances Cesar Birotteau became deputy-mayor and perfumer, retired officer of the National Guard, and chevalier of the Legion of honor. In bringing to light the depths of his character and the causes of his rise, we shall show that fortuitous commercial events which strong brains dominate, may become irreparable catastrophes for weak ones. Events are never absolute; their results depend on individuals. Misfortune is a stepping-stone for genius, the baptismal font of Christians, a treasure for the skilful man, an abyss for the feeble.

A vine-dresser in the neighborhood of Chinon, named Jean Birotteau, married the waiting-maid of a lady whose vines he tilled. He had three sons; his wife died in giving birth to the last, and the poor man did not long survive her. The mistress had been fond of the maid, and brought up with her own sons the eldest child, Francois, and placed him in a seminary. Ordained priest, Francois Birotteau hid himself during the Revolution, and led the wandering life of priests not sworn by the Republic, hunted like wild beasts and guillotined at the first chance. At the time when this history begins he was vicar of the cathedral of Tours, and had only once left that city to visit his brother Cesar. The bustle of Paris so bewildered the good priest that he was afraid to leave his room. He called the cabriolets “half-coaches,” and wondered at all he saw. After a week’s stay he went back to Tours resolving never to revisit the capital.

The second son of the vine-dresser, Jean Birotteau, was drafted into the militia, and won the rank of captain early in the wars of the Revolution. At the battle of Trebia, Macdonald called for volunteers to carry a battery. Captain Jean Birotteau advanced with his company, and was killed. The destiny of the Birotteaus demanded, no doubt, that they should be oppressed by men, or by circumstances, wheresoever they planted themselves.

The last child is the hero of this story. When Cesar at fourteen years of age could read, write, and cipher, he left his native place and came to Paris on foot to seek his fortune, with one louis in his pocket. The recommendation of an apothecary at Tours got him a place as shop-boy with Monsieur and Madame Ragon, perfumers. Cesar owned at this period a pair of hob-nailed shoes, a pair of breeches, blue stockings, a flowered waistcoat, a peasant’s jacket, three coarse shirts of good linen, and his travelling cudgel. If his hair was cut like that of a choir-boy, he at least had the sturdy loins of a Tourangian; if he yielded sometimes to the native idleness of his birthplace, it was counterbalanced by his desire to make his fortune; if he lacked cleverness and education, he possessed an instinctive rectitude and delicate feelings, which he inherited from his mother, – a being who had, in Tourangian phrase, a “heart of gold.” Cesar received from the Ragons his food, six francs a month as wages, and a pallet to sleep upon in the garret near the cook. The clerks who taught him to pack the goods, to do the errands, and sweep up the shop and the pavement, made fun of him as they did so, according to the manners and customs of shop-keeping, in which chaff is a principal element of instruction. Monsieur and Madame Ragon spoke to him like a dog. No one paid attention to his weariness, though many a night his feet, blistered by the pavements of Paris, and his bruised shoulders, made him suffer horribly. This harsh application of the maxim “each for himself,” – the gospel of large cities, – made Cesar think the life of Paris very hard. At night he cried as he thought of Touraine, where the peasant works at his ease, where the mason lays a stone between breakfast and dinner, and idleness is wisely mingled with labor; but he always fell asleep without having time to think of running away, for he had his errands to do in the morning, and obeyed his duty with the instinct of a watch-dog. If occasionally he complained, the head clerk would smile with a jovial air, and say, —

"Ah, my boy! all is not rose at 'The Queen of Roses.' Larks don't fall down roasted; you must run after them and catch them, and then you must find some way to cook them."

The cook, a big creature from Picardy, took the best bits for herself, and only spoke to Cesar when she wanted to complain of Monsieur and Madame Ragon, who left her nothing to steal. Towards the end of the first month this girl, who was forced to keep house of a Sunday, opened a conversation with Cesar. Ursula with the grease washed off seemed charming to the poor shop-boy, who, unless hindered by chance, was likely to strike on the first rock that lay hidden in his way. Like all unprotected boys, he loved the first woman who threw him a kind look. The cook took Cesar under her protection; and thence followed certain secret relations, which the clerks laughed at pitilessly. Two years later, the cook happily abandoned Cesar for a young recruit belonging to her native place who was then hiding in Paris, – a lad twenty years old, owning a few acres of land, who let Ursula marry him.

During those two years the cook had fed her little Cesar well, and had explained to him certain mysteries of Parisian life, which she made him look at from the bottom; and she impressed upon him, out of jealousy, a profound horror of evil places, whose dangers seemed not unknown to her. In 1792 the feet of the deserted Cesar were well-toughened to the pavements, his shoulders to the bales, and his mind to what he called the "humbugs" of Paris. So when Ursula abandoned him he was speedily consoled, for she had realized none of his instinctive ideas in relation to sentiment. Licentious and surly, wheedling and pilfering, selfish and a tippler, she clashed with the simple nature of Birotteau without offering him any compensating perspective. Sometimes the poor lad felt with pain that he was bound by ties that are strong enough to hold ingenuous hearts to a creature with whom he could not sympathize. By the time that he became master of his own heart he had reached his growth, and was sixteen years old. His mind, developed by Ursula and by the banter of the clerks, made him study commerce with an eye in which intelligence was veiled beneath simplicity: he observed the customers; asked in leisure moments for explanations about the merchandise, whose divers sorts and proper places he retained in his head. The day came when he knew all the articles, and their prices and marks, better than any new-comer; and from that time Monsieur and Madame Ragon made a practice of employing him in the business.

When the terrible levy of the year II. made a clean sweep in the shop of citizen Ragon, Cesar Birotteau, promoted to be second clerk, profited by the occasion to obtain a salary of fifty francs a month, and took his seat at the dinner-table of the Ragons with ineffable delight. The second clerk of "The Queen of Roses," possessing already six hundred francs, now had a chamber where he could put away, in long-coveted articles of furniture, the clothing he had little by little got together. Dressed like other young men of an epoch when fashion required the assumption of boorish manners, the gentle and modest peasant had an air and manner which rendered him at least their equal; and he thus passed the barriers which in other times ordinary life would have placed between himself and the bourgeoisie. Towards the end of this year his integrity won him a place in the counting-room. The dignified citoyenne Ragon herself looked after his linen, and the two shopkeepers became familiar with him.

In Vendemiaire, 1794, Cesar, who possessed a hundred louis d'or, changed them for six thousand francs in assignats, with which he bought into the Funds at thirty, paying for the investment on the very day before the paper began its course of depreciation at the Bourse, and locking up his securities with unspeakable satisfaction. From that day forward he watched the movement of stocks and public affairs with secret anxieties of his own, which made him quiver at each rumor of the reverses or successes that marked this period of our history. Monsieur Ragon, formerly perfumer to her majesty Queen Marie-Antoinette, confided to Cesar Birotteau, during this critical period, his attachment to the fallen tyrants. This disclosure was one of the cardinal events in Cesar's life. The nightly conversations when the shop was closed, the street quiet, the accounts regulated, made a fanatic of the Tourangian, who in becoming a royalist obeyed an inborn instinct. The recital of the virtuous

deeds of Louis XVI., the anecdotes with which husband and wife exalted the memory of the queen, fired the imagination of the young man. The horrible fate of those two crowned heads, decapitated a few steps from the shop-door, roused his feeling heart and made him hate a system of government which was capable of shedding blood without repugnance. His commercial interests showed him the death of trade in the Maximum, and in political convulsions, which are always destructive of business. Moreover, like a true perfumer, he hated the revolution which made a Titus of every man and abolished powder. The tranquillity resulting from absolutism could alone, he thought, give life to money, and he grew bigoted on behalf of royalty. When Monsieur Ragon saw that Cesar was well-disposed on this point, he made him head-clerk and initiated him into the secrets of "The Queen of Roses," several of whose customers were the most active and devoted emissaries of the Bourbons, and where the correspondence between Paris and the West secretly went on. Carried away by the fervor of youth, electrified by his intercourse with the Georges, the Billardiere, Montauran, Bauvan, Longuy, Manda, Bernier, du Guenic, and the Fontaines, Cesar flung himself into the conspiracy by which the royalists and the terrorists combined on the 13th Vendemiaire against the expiring Convention.

On that day Cesar had the honor of fighting against Napoleon on the steps of Saint-Roch, and was wounded at the beginning of the affair. Every one knows the result of that attempt. If the aide-de-camp of Barras then issued from his obscurity, the obscurity of Birotteau saved the clerk's life. A few friends carried the belligerent perfumer to "The Queen of Roses," where he remained hidden in the garret, nursed by Madame Ragon, and happily forgotten. Cesar Birotteau never had but that one spurt of martial courage. During the month his convalescence lasted, he made solid reflections on the absurdity of an alliance between politics and perfumery. Although he remained royalist, he resolved to be, purely and simply, a royalist perfumer, and never more to compromise himself, body and soul, for his country.

On the 18th Brumaire, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, despairing of the royal cause, determined to give up perfumery, and live like honest bourgeois without meddling in politics. To recover the value of their business, it was necessary to find a man who had more integrity than ambition, more plain good sense than ability. Ragon proposed the affair to his head-clerk. Birotteau, now master at twenty years of age of a thousand francs a year from the public Funds, hesitated. His ambition was to live near Chinon as soon as he could get together an income of fifteen hundred francs, or whenever the First Consul should have consolidated the public debt by consolidating himself in the Tuileries. Why should he risk his honest and simple independence in commercial uncertainties? he asked himself. He had never expected to win so large a fortune, and he owed it to happy chances which only come in early youth; he intended to marry in Touraine some woman rich enough to enable him to buy and cultivate Les Tresorieres, a little property which, from the dawn of his reason, he had coveted, which he dreamed of augmenting, where he could make a thousand crowns a year, and where he would lead a life of happy obscurity. He was about to refuse the offer, when love suddenly changed all his resolutions by increasing tenfold the measure of his ambition.

After Ursula's desertion, Cesar had remained virtuous, as much through fear of the dangers of Paris as from application to his work. When the passions are without food they change their wants; marriage then becomes, to persons of the middle class, a fixed idea, for it is their only way of winning and appropriating a woman. Cesar Birotteau had reached that point. Everything at "The Queen of Roses" now rested on the head-clerk; he had not a moment to give to pleasure. In such a life wants become imperious, and a chance meeting with a beautiful young woman, of whom a libertine clerk would scarcely have dreamed, produced on Cesar an overpowering effect. On a fine June day, crossing by the Pont-Marie to the Ile Saint-Louis, he saw a young girl standing at the door of a shop at the angle of the Quai d'Anjou. Constance Pillerault was the forewoman of a linen-draper's establishment called Le Petit Matelot, – the first of those shops which have since been established in Paris with more or less of painted signs, floating banners, show-cases filled with swinging shawls, cravats arranged like houses of cards, and a thousand other commercial seductions, such as fixed prices, fillets of

suspended objects, placards, illusions and optical effects carried to such a degree of perfection that a shop-front has now become a commercial poem. The low price of all the articles called "Novelties" which were to be found at the Petit-Matelot gave the shop an unheard of vogue, and that in a part of Paris which was the least favorable to fashion and commerce. The young forewoman was at this time cited for her beauty, as was the case in later days with the beautiful lemonade-girl of the cafe of the Milles Colonnnes, and several other poor creatures who flattened more noses, young and old, against the window-panes of milliners, confectioners, and linen-drapers, than there are stones in the streets of Paris.

The head-clerk of "The Queen of Roses," living between Saint-Roch and the Rue de la Sourdiere, knew nothing of the existence of the Petit-Matelot; for the smaller trades of Paris are more or less strangers to each other. Cesar was so vigorously smitten by the beauty of Constance that he rushed furiously into the shop to buy six linen shirts, disputing the price a long time, and requiring volumes of linen to be unfolded and shown to him, precisely like an Englishwoman in the humor for "shopping." The young person deigned to take notice of Cesar, perceiving, by certain symptoms known to women, that he came more for the seller than the goods. He dictated his name and address to the young lady, who grew very indifferent to the admiration of her customer once the purchase was made. The poor clerk had had little to do to win the good graces of Ursula; in such matters he was as silly as a sheep, and love now made him sillier. He dared not utter a word, and was moreover too dazzled to observe the indifference which succeeded the smiles of the siren shopwoman.

For eight succeeding days Cesar mounted guard every evening before the Petit-Matelot, watching for a look as a dog waits for a bone at the kitchen door, indifferent to the derision of the clerks and the shop-girls, humbly stepping aside for the buyers and passers-by, and absorbed in the little revolving world of the shop. Some days later he again entered the paradise of his angel, less to purchase handkerchiefs than to communicate to her a luminous idea.

"If you should have need of perfumery, Mademoiselle, I could furnish you in the same manner," he said as he paid for the handkerchiefs.

Constance Pillerault was daily receiving brilliant proposals, in which there was no question of marriage; and though her heart was as pure as her forehead was white, it was only after six months of marches and counter-marches, in the course of which Cesar revealed his inextinguishable love, that she condescended to receive his attentions, and even then without committing herself to an answer, – a prudence suggested by the number of her swains, wholesale wine-merchants, rich proprietors of cafes, and others who made soft eyes at her. The lover was backed up in his suit by the guardian of Constance, Monsieur Claude-Joseph Pillerault, at that time an ironmonger on the Quai de la Ferraille, whom the young man had finally discovered by devoting himself to the subterraneous spying which distinguishes a genuine love.

The rapidity of this narrative compels us to pass over in silence the joys of Parisian love tasted with innocence, the prodigalities peculiar to clerkdom, such as melons in their earliest prime, choice dinners at Venua's followed by the theatre, Sunday jaunts to the country in hackney-coaches. Without being handsome, there was nothing in Cesar's person which made it difficult to love him. The life of Paris and his sojourn in a dark shop had dulled the brightness of his peasant complexion. His abundant black hair, his solid neck and shoulders like those of a Norman horse, his sturdy limbs, his honest and straightforward manner, all contributed to predispose others in his favor. The uncle Pillerault, whose duty it was to watch over the happiness of his brother's daughter, made inquiries which resulted in his sanctioning the wishes of the young Tourangian. In the year 1800, and in the pretty month of May, Mademoiselle Pillerault consented to marry Cesar Birotteau, who fainted with joy at the moment when, under a linden at Sceaux, Constance-Barbe-Josephine Pillerault accepted him as her husband.

"My little girl," said Monsieur Pillerault, "you have won a good husband. He has a warm heart and honorable feelings; he is true as gold, and as good as an infant Jesus, – in fact, a king of men."

Constance frankly abdicated the more brilliant destiny to which, like all shop-girls, she may at times have aspired. She wished to be an honest woman, a good mother of a family, and looked at life according to the religious programme of the middle classes. Such a career suited her own ideas far better than the dangerous vanities which seduce so many youthful Parisian imaginations. Constance, with her narrow intelligence, was a type of the petty bourgeoisie whose labors are not performed without grumbling; who begin by refusing what they desire, and end by getting angry when taken at their word; whose restless activity is carried into the kitchen and into the counting-room, into the gravest matters of business, and into the invisible darns of the household linen; who love while scolding, who conceive no ideas but the simplest (the small change of the mind); who argue about everything, fear everything, calculate everything, and fret perpetually over the future. Her cold but ingenuous beauty, her touching expression, her freshness and purity, prevented Birotteau from thinking of her defects, which moreover were more than compensated by a delicate sense of honor natural to women, by an excessive love of order, by a fanaticism for work, and by her genius as a saleswoman. Constance was eighteen years old, and possessed eleven thousand francs of her own. Cesar, inspired by his love with an excessive ambition, bought the business of "The Queen of Roses" and removed it to a handsome building near the Place Vendome. At the early age of twenty-one, married to a woman he adored, the proprietor of an establishment for which he had paid three quarters of the price down, he had the right to view, and did view, the future in glowing colors; all the more when he measured the path which led from his original point of departure. Roguin, notary of Ragon, who had drawn up the marriage contract, gave the new perfumer some sound advice, and prevented him from paying the whole purchase money down with the fortune of his wife.

"Keep the means of undertaking some good enterprise, my lad," he had said to him.

Birotteau looked up to the notary with admiration, fell into the habit of consulting him, and made him his friend. Like Ragon and Pillerault, he had so much faith in the profession that he gave himself up to Roguin without allowing himself a suspicion. Thanks to this advice, Cesar, supplied with the eleven thousand francs of his wife for his start in business, would have scorned to exchange his possessions for those of the First Consul, brilliant as the prospects of Napoleon might seem. At first the Birotteaus kept only a cook, and lived in the *entresol* above the shop, – a sort of den tolerably well decorated by an upholsterer, where the bride and bridegroom began a honeymoon that was never to end. Madame Cesar appeared to advantage behind the counter. Her celebrated beauty had an enormous influence upon the sales, and the beautiful Madame Birotteau became a topic among the fashionable young men of the Empire. If Cesar was sometimes accused of royalism, the world did justice to his honesty; if a few neighboring shopkeepers envied his happiness, every one at least thought him worthy of it. The bullet which struck him on the steps of Saint-Roch gave him the reputation of being mixed up with political secrets, and also of being a courageous man, – though he had no military courage in his heart, and not the smallest political idea in his brain. Upon these grounds the worthy people of the arrondissement made him captain of the National Guard; but he was cashiered by Napoleon, who, according to Birotteau, owed him a grudge for their encounter on the 13th Vendemiaire. Cesar thus obtained at a cheap rate a varnish of persecution, which made him interesting in the eyes of the opposition, and gave him a certain importance.

Such was the history of this household, lastingly happy through its feeling, and agitated only by commercial anxieties.

During the first year Cesar instructed his wife about the sales of their merchandise and the details of perfumery, – a business which she understood admirably. She really seemed to have been created and sent into the world to fit on the gloves of customers. At the close of that year the assets staggered our ambitious perfumer; all costs calculated, he would be able in less than twenty years to make a modest capital of one hundred thousand francs, which was the sum at which he estimated their happiness. He then resolved to reach fortune more rapidly, and determined to manufacture articles as well as retail them. Contrary to the advice of his wife, he hired some sheds, with the ground

about them, in the Faubourg du Temple, and painted upon them in big letters, “Manufactory of Cesar Birotteau.” He enticed a skilful workman from Grasse, with whom he began, on equal shares, the manufacture of soaps, essences, and eau-de-cologne. His connection with this man lasted only six months, and ended by losses which fell upon him alone. Without allowing himself to be discouraged, Birotteau determined to get better results at any price, solely to avoid being scolded by his wife, – to whom he acknowledged later that in those depressing days his head had boiled like a saucepan, and that several times, if it had not been for his religious sentiments, he should have flung himself into the Seine.

Harassed by some unprofitable enterprise, he was lounging one day along the boulevard on his way to dinner, – for the Parisian lounger is as often a man filled with despair as an idler, – when among a parcel of books for six sous a-piece, laid out in a hamper on the pavement, his eyes lighted on the following title, yellow with dust: “Abdeker, or the Art of Preserving Beauty.” He picked up the so-called Arab book, a sort of romance written by a physician of the preceding century, and happened on a page which related to perfumes. Leaning against a tree on the boulevard to turn over the leaves at his ease, he read a note by the author which explained the nature of the skin and the cuticle, and showed that a certain soap, or a certain paste, often produced effects quite contrary to those expected of them, if the soap and the paste toned up a skin which needed relaxing, or relaxed a skin which required tones. Birotteau bought the book, in which he saw his fortune. Nevertheless, having little confidence in his own lights, he consulted a celebrated chemist, Vauquelin, from whom he naively inquired how to mix a two-sided cosmetic which should produce effects appropriate to the diversified nature of the human epidermis. Truly scientific men – men who are really great in the sense that they never attain in their lifetime the renown which their immense and unrecognized labors deserve – are nearly always kind, and willing to serve the poor in spirit. Vauquelin accordingly patronized the perfumer, and allowed him to call himself the inventor of a paste to whiten the hands, the composition of which he dictated to him. Birotteau named this cosmetic the “Double Paste of Sultans.” To complete the work, he applied the same recipe to the manufacture of a lotion for the complexion, which he called the “Carminative Balm.” He imitated in his own line the system of the Petit-Matelot, and was the first perfumer to display that redundancy of placards, advertisements, and other methods of publication which are called, perhaps unjustly, charlatanism.

The Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm were ushered into the world of fashion and commerce by colored placards, at the head of which were these words, “Approved by the Institute.” This formula, used for the first time, had a magical effect. Not only all France, but the continent flaunted with the posters, yellow, red, and blue, of the monarch of the “The Queen of Roses,” who kept in stock, supplied, and manufactured, at moderate prices, all that belonged to his trade. At a period when nothing was talked of but the East, to name any sort of cosmetic the “Paste of Sultans” thus divining the magic force of such words in a land where every man hoped to be a sultan as much as every woman longed to be a sultana, was an inspiration which could only have come to a common man or a man of genius. The public always judges by results. Birotteau passed for a superior man, commercially speaking; all the more because he compiled a prospectus whose ridiculous phraseology was an element of success. In France they only made fun of things which occupy the public mind, and the public does not occupy itself with things that do not succeed. Though Birotteau perpetrated this folly in good faith and not as a trick, the world gave him credit for knowing how to play the fool for a purpose. We have found, not without difficulty, a copy of this prospectus at the establishment of Popinot and Co., druggists, Rue des Lombards. This curious document belongs to the class which, in a higher sphere, historians call *pieces justificatives*. We give it here:

THE DOUBLE PASTE OF SULTANS

AND CARMINATIVE BALM

Of Cesar Birotteau

MARVELLOUS DISCOVERY!

Approved by the Institute of France

"For many years a paste for the hands and a lotion for the face offering superior results to those obtained from Eau-de-Cologne in the domain of the toilet, has been widely sought by both sexes in Europe. Devoting long vigils to the study of the skin and cuticle of the two sexes, each of whom, one as much as the other, attach the utmost importance to the softness, suppleness, brilliancy, and velvet texture of the complexion, the Sieur Birotteau, perfumer, favorably known in this metropolis and abroad, has discovered a Paste and a Lotion justly hailed as marvellous by the fashion and elegance of Paris. In point of fact, this Paste and this Lotion possess amazing properties which act upon the skin without prematurely wrinkling it, – the inevitable result of drugs thoughtlessly employed, and sold in these days by ignorance and cupidity. This discovery rests upon diversities of temperament, which divide themselves into two great classes, indicated by the color of the Paste and the Lotion, which will be found *pink* for the skin and cuticle of persons of lymphatic habit, and *white* for those possessed of a sanguine temperament.

"This Paste is named the 'Paste of Sultans,' because the discovery was originally made for the Seraglio by an Arabian physician. It has been approved by the Institute on the recommendation of our illustrious chemist, Vauquelin; together with the Lotion, fabricated on the same principles which govern the composition of the Paste.

"This precious Paste, exhaling as it does the sweetest perfumes, removes all blotches, even those that are obstinately rebellious, whitens the most recalcitrant epidermis, and dissipates the perspirations of the hand, of which both sexes equally complain.

"The Carminative Balm will disperse the little pimples which appear inopportunely at certain times, and interfere with a lady's projects for a ball; it refreshes and revives the color by opening or shutting the pores of the skin according to the exigencies of the individual temperament. It is so well known already for its effect in arresting the ravages of time that many, out of gratitude, have called it the 'Friend of Beauty.'

"Eau-de-Cologne is, purely and simply, a trivial perfume without special efficacy of any kind; while the Double Paste of Sultans and the Carminative Balm are two operative compounds, of a motive power which acts without risk upon the

internal energies and seconds them. Their perfumes (essentially balsamic, and of a stimulating character which admirably revives the heart and brain) awake ideas and vivify them; they are as wonderful for their simplicity as for their merits. In short, they offer one attraction the more to women, and to men a means of seduction which it is within their power to secure.

"The daily use of the Balm will relieve the smart occasioned by the heat of the razor; it will protect the lips from chapping, and restore their color; it dispels in time all discolorations, and revives the natural tones of the skin. Such results demonstrate in man a perfect equilibrium of the juices of life, which tends to relieve all persons subject to headache from the sufferings of that horrible malady. Finally, the Carminative Balm, which can be employed by women in all stages of their toilet, will prevent cutaneous diseases by facilitating the transpiration of the tissues, and communicating to them a permanent texture like that of velvet.

"Address, post-paid, Monsieur Cesar Birotteau, successor to Ragon, former perfumer to the Queen Marie Antoinette, at The Queen of Roses, Rue Saint-Honore, Paris, near the Place Vendome.

"The price of a cake of Paste is three francs; that of the bottle six francs.

"Monsieur Cesar Birotteau, to avoid counterfeits, informs the public that the Paste is wrapped in paper bearing his signature, and that the bottles have a stamp blown in the glass."

The success was owing, without Cesar's suspecting it, to Constance, who advised him to send cases of the Carminative Balm and the Paste of Sultans to all perfumers in France and in foreign cities, offering them at the same time a discount of thirty per cent if they would buy the two articles by the gross. The Paste and the Balm were, in reality, worth more than other cosmetics of the sort; and they captivated ignorant people by the distinctions they set up among the temperaments. The five hundred perfumers of France, allured by the discount, each bought annually from Birotteau more than three hundred gross of the Paste and the Lotion, – a consumption which, if it gave only a limited profit on each article, became enormous considered in bulk. Cesar was then able to buy the huts and the land in the Faubourg du Temple; he built large manufactories, and decorated his shop at "The Queen of Roses" with much magnificence; his household began to taste the little joys of competence, and his wife no longer trembled as before.

In 1810 Madame Cesar, foreseeing a rise in rents, pushed her husband into becoming chief tenant of the house where they had hitherto occupied only the shop and the *entresol*, and advised him to remove their own appartement to the first floor. A fortunate event induced Constance to shut her eyes to the follies which Birotteau committed for her sake in fitting up the new appartement. The perfumer had just been elected judge in the commercial courts: his integrity, his well-known sense of honor, and the respect he enjoyed, earned for him this dignity, which ranked him henceforth among the leading merchants of Paris. To improve his knowledge, he rose daily at five o'clock, and read law-reports and books treating of commercial litigation. His sense of justice, his rectitude, his conscientious intentions, – qualities essential to the understanding of questions submitted for consular decision, – soon made him highly esteemed among the judges. His defects contributed not a little to his reputation. Conscious of his inferiority, Cesar subordinated his own views to those of his colleagues, who were flattered in being thus deferred to. Some sought the silent approbation of a man held to be sagacious, in his capacity of listener; others, charmed with his modesty and gentleness, praised him publicly. Plaintiffs and defendants extolled his kindness, his conciliatory spirit; and he was often chosen umpire in contests where his own good sense would have suggested the swift justice of a Turkish cadi. During his whole period in office he contrived to use language which was a medley of commonplaces mixed with maxims and computations served up in flowing phrases mildly put forth, which sounded to the ears of superficial people like eloquence. Thus he pleased that great

majority, mediocre by nature, who are condemned to perpetual labor and to views which are of the earth earthy. Cesar, however, lost so much time in court that his wife obliged him finally to resign the expensive dignity.

Towards 1813, the Birotteau household, thanks to its constant harmony, and after steadily plodding on through life, saw the dawn of an era of prosperity which nothing seemed likely to interrupt. Monsieur and Madame Ragon, their predecessors, the uncle Pillerault, Roguin the notary, the Messrs. Matifat, druggists in the Rue des Lombards and purveyors to "The Queen of Roses," Joseph Lebas, woollen draper and successor to the Messrs. Guillaume at the Maison du Chat-qui-pelote (one of the luminaries of the Rue Saint-Denis), Popinot the judge, brother of Madame Ragon, Chiffreville of the firm of Protez & Chiffreville, Monsieur and Madame Cochin, employed in the treasury department and sleeping partners in the house of Matifat, the Abbe Loraux, confessor and director of the pious members of this coterie, with a few other persons, made up the circle of their friends. In spite of the royalist sentiments of Birotteau, public opinion was in his favor; he was considered very rich, though in fact he possessed only a hundred thousand francs over and above his business. The regularity of his affairs, his punctuality, his habit of making no debts, of never discounting his paper, and of taking, on the contrary, safe securities from those whom he could thus oblige, together with his general amiability, won him enormous credit. His household cost him nearly twenty thousand francs a year, and the education of Cesarine, an only daughter, idolized by Constance as well as by himself, necessitated heavy expenses. Neither husband nor wife considered money when it was a question of giving pleasure to their child, from whom they had never been willing to separate. Imagine the happiness of the poor parvenu peasant as he listened to his charming Cesarine playing a sonata of Steibelt's on the piano, and singing a ballad; or when he found her writing the French language correctly, or reading Racine, father and son, and explaining their beauties, or sketching a landscape, or painting in sepia! What joy to live again in a flower so pure, so lovely, which had never left the maternal stem; an angel whose budding graces and whose earliest developments he had passionately watched; an only daughter, incapable of despising her father, or of ridiculing his defective education, so truly was she an ingenuous young girl.

When he first came to Paris, Cesar had known how to read, write, and cipher, but his education stopped there; his laborious life had kept him from acquiring ideas and knowledge outside the business of perfumery. Mixing wholly with people to whom science and letters were of no importance, and whose information did not go beyond their specialty, having no time to give to higher studies, the perfumer had become a merely practical man. He adopted necessarily the language, blunders, and opinions of the bourgeois of Paris, who admires Moliere, Voltaire, and Rousseau on faith, and buys their books without ever reading them; who maintains that people should say *ormoires*, because women put away their gold and their dresses and moire in those articles of furniture, and that it is only a corruption of the language to say *armoires*. Potier, Talma, and Mademoiselle Mars were ten times millionaires, and did not live like other human beings; the great tragedian ate raw meat, and Mademoiselle Mars sometimes drank dissolved pearls, in imitation of a celebrated Egyptian actress. The Emperor had leather pockets in his waistcoat, so that he could take his snuff by the handful; he rode on horseback at full gallop up the stairway of the orangery at Versailles. Writers and artists died in the hospital, as a natural consequence of their eccentricities; they were, moreover, all atheists, and people should be very careful not to admit them into their households. Joseph Lebas cited with horror the history of his step-sister Augustine's marriage with the painter Sommervieux. Astronomers lived on spiders.

These striking points of information on the French language, on dramatic art, politics, literature, and science, will explain the bearings of the bourgeois intellect. A poet passing through the Rue des Lombards may dream of Araby as he inhales certain perfumes. He may admire the *danseuses* in a *chauderie*, as he breathes the odors of an Indian root. Dazzled by the blaze of cochineal, he recalls the poems of the Veda, the religion of Brahma and its castes; brushing against piles of ivory in the rough,

he mounts the backs of elephants; seated in a muslin cage, he makes love like the King of Lahore. But the little retail merchant is ignorant from whence have come, or where may grow, the products in which he deals. Birotteau, perfumer, did not know an iota of natural history, nor of chemistry. Though regarding Vauquelin as a great man, he thought him an exception, – of about the same capacity as the retired grocer who summed up a discussion on the method of importing teas, by remarking with a knowing air, "There are but two ways: tea comes either by caravan, or by Havre." According to Birotteau aloes and opium were only to be found in the Rue des Lombards. Rosewater, said to be brought from Constantinople, was made in Paris like eau-de-cologne. The names of these places were shams, invented to please Frenchmen who could not endure the things of their own country. A French merchant must call his discoveries English to make them fashionable, just as in England the druggists attribute theirs to France.

Nevertheless, Cesar was incapable of being wholly stupid or a fool. Honesty and goodness cast upon all the acts of his life a light which made them creditable; for noble conduct makes even ignorance seem worthy. Success gave him confidence. In Paris confidence is accepted as power, of which it is the outward sign. As for Madame Birotteau, having measured Cesar during the first three years of their married life, she was a prey to continual terror. She represented in their union the sagacious and fore-casting side, – doubt, opposition, and fear; while Cesar, on the other hand, was the embodiment of audacity, energy, and the inexpressible delights of fatalism. Yet in spite of these appearances the husband often quaked, while the wife, in reality, was possessed of patience and true courage.

Thus it happened that a man who was both mediocre and pusillanimous, without education, without ideas, without knowledge, without force of character, and who might be expected not to succeed in the slipperiest city in the world, came by his principles of conduct, by his sense of justice, by the goodness of a heart that was truly Christian, and through his love for the only woman he had really won, to be considered as a remarkable man, courageous, and full of resolution. The public saw results only. Excepting Pillerault and Popinot the judge, all the people of his own circle knew him superficially, and were unable to judge him. Moreover, the twenty or thirty friends he had collected about him talked the same nonsense, repeated the same commonplaces, and all thought themselves superior in their own line. The women vied with each other in dress and good dinners; each had said her all when she dropped a contemptuous word about her husband. Madame Birotteau alone had the good sense to treat hers with honor and respect in public; she knew him to be a man who, in spite of his secret disabilities, had earned their fortune, and whose good name she shared. It is true that she sometimes asked herself what sort of world this could be, if all the men who were thought superior were like her husband. Such conduct contributed not a little to maintain the respectful esteem bestowed upon the perfumer in a community where women are much inclined to complain of their husbands and bring them into discredit.

The first days of the year 1814, so fatal to imperial France, were marked at the Birotteaus by two events, not especially remarkable in other households, but of a nature to impress such simple souls as Cesar and his wife, who casting their eyes along the past could find nothing but tender memories. They had taken as head-clerk a young man twenty-two years of age, named Ferdinand du Tillet. This lad – who had just left a perfumery where he was refused a share in the business, and who was reckoned a genius – had made great efforts to get employed at "The Queen of Roses," whose methods, facilities, and customs were well known to him. Birotteau took him, and gave him a salary of a thousand francs, intending to make him eventually his successor.

Ferdinand had so great an influence on the destinies of this family that it is necessary to say a few words about him. In the first place he was named simply Ferdinand, without surname. This anonymous condition seemed to him an immense advantage at the time when Napoleon conscripted all families to fill the ranks. He was, however, born somewhere, as the result of some cruel and voluptuous caprice. The following are the only facts preserved about his civil condition. In 1793 a

poor girl of Tillet, a village near Andelys, came by night and gave birth to a child in the garden of the curate of the church at Tillet, and after rapping on the window-shutters went away and drowned herself. The good priest took the child, gave him the name of the saint inscribed on the calendar for that day, and fed and brought him up as his own son. The curate died in 1804, without leaving enough property to carry on the education he had begun. Ferdinand, thrown upon Paris, led a filibustering life whose chances might bring him to the scaffold, to fortune, the bar, the army, commerce, or domestic life. Obliged to live like a Figaro, he was first a commercial traveller, then a perfumer's clerk in Paris, where he turned up after traversing all France, having studied the world and made up his mind to succeed at any price.

In 1813 Ferdinand thought it necessary to register his age, and obtain a civil standing by applying to the courts at Andelys for a judgment, which should enable his baptismal record to be transferred from the registry of the parish to that of the mayor's office; and he obtained permission to rectify the document by inserting the name of du Tillet, under which he was known, and which legally belonged to him through the fact of his exposure and abandonment in that township. Without father, mother, or other guardian than the *procureur imperial*, alone in the world and owing no duty to any man, he found society a hard stepmother, and he handled it, in his turn, without gloves, – as the Turks the Moors; he knew no guide but his own interests, and any means to fortune he considered good. This young Norman, gifted with dangerous abilities, coupled his desires for success with the harsh defects which, justly or unjustly, are attributed to the natives of his province. A wheedling manner cloaked a quibbling mind, for he was in truth a hard judicial wrangler. But if he boldly contested the rights of others, he certainly yielded none of his own; he attacked his adversary at the right moment, and wearied him out with his inflexible persistency. His merits were those of the Scapins of ancient comedy; he had their fertility of resource, their cleverness in skirting evil, their itching to lay hold of all that was good to keep. In short, he applied to his own poverty a saying which the Abbe Terray uttered in the name of the State, – he kept a loophole to become in after years an honest man. Gifted with passionate energy, with a boldness that was almost military in requiring good as well as evil actions from those about him, and justifying such demands on the theory of personal interest, he despised men too much, believing them all corruptible, he was too unscrupulous in the choice of means, thinking all equally good, he was too thoroughly convinced that the success of money was the absolution of all moral mechanism, not to attain his ends sooner or later.

Such a man, standing between the hulks and a vast fortune, was necessarily vindictive, domineering, quick in decisions, yet as dissimulating as a Cromwell planning to decapitate the head of integrity. His real depth was hidden under a light and jesting mind. Mere clerk as he was, his ambition knew no bounds. With one comprehensive glance of hatred he had taken in the whole of society, saying boldly to himself, "Thou shalt be mine!" He had vowed not to marry till he was forty, and kept his word. Physically, Ferdinand was a tall, slender young man, with a good figure and adaptive manners, which enabled him to take, on occasion, the key-note of the various societies in which he found himself. His ignoble face was rather pleasant at first sight; but later, on closer acquaintance, expressions were caught such as come to the surface of those who are ill at ease in their own minds, and whose consciences groan at certain times. His complexion, which was sanguine under the soft skin of a Norman, had a crude or acrid color. The glance of his eye, whose iris was circled with a whitish rim as if it were lined with silver, was evasive yet terrible when he fixed it straight upon his victim. His voice had a hollow sound, like that of a man worn out with much speaking. His thin lips were not wanting in charm, but his pointed nose and slightly projecting forehead showed defects of race; and his hair, of a tint like hair that has been dyed black, indicated a mongrel descent, through which he derived his mental qualities from some libertine lord, his low instincts from a seduced peasant-girl, his knowledge from an incomplete education, and his vices from his deserted and abandoned condition.

Birotteau discovered with much amazement that his clerk went out in the evening very elegantly dressed, came home late, and was seen at the balls of bankers and notaries. Such habits displeased

Cesar, according to whose ideas clerks should study the books of the firm and think only of their business. The worthy man was shocked by trifles, and reproached du Tillet gently for wearing linen that was too fine, for leaving cards on which his name was inscribed, F. du Tillet, – a fashion, according to commercial jurisprudence, which belonged only to the great world. Ferdinand had entered the employ of this Orgon with the intentions of a Tartuffe. He paid court to Madame Cesar, tried to seduce her, and judged his master very much as the wife judged him herself, and all with alarming rapidity. Though discreet, reserved, and accustomed to say only what he meant to say, du Tillet unbosomed his opinions on men and life in a way to shock a scrupulous woman who shared the religious feelings of her husband, and who thought it a crime to do the least harm to a neighbor. In spite of Madame Birotteau's caution, du Tillet suspected the contempt in which she held him. Constance, to whom Ferdinand had written a few love-letters, soon noticed a change in his manners, which grew presuming, as if intended to convey the idea of a mutual good understanding. Without giving the secret reason to her husband, she advised him to send Ferdinand away. Birotteau agreed with his wife, and the dismissal was determined upon.

Two days before it was carried into effect, on a Saturday night when Birotteau was making up his monthly accounts, three thousand francs were found to be missing. His consternation was dreadful, less for the loss than for the suspicions which fell upon three clerks, one cook, a shop-boy, and several habitual workmen. On whom should he lay the blame? Madame Birotteau never left her counter. The clerk who had charge of the desk was a nephew of Monsieur Ragon named Popinot, a young man nineteen years old, who lived with the Birotteaus and was integrity itself. His figures, which disagreed with the money in the desk, revealed the deficit, and showed that the abstraction had been made after the balance had been added up. Husband and wife resolved to keep silence and watch the house. On the following day, Sunday, they received their friends. The families who made up their coterie met at each other's houses for little festivities, turn and turn about. While playing at *bouillote*, Roguin the notary placed on the card-table some old louis d'or which Madame Cesar had taken only a few days before from a bride, Madame d'Espart.

"Have you been robbing the poor-box?" asked the perfumer, laughing.

Roguin replied that he had won the money, at the house of a banker, from du Tillet, who confirmed the answer without blushing. Cesar, on the other hand, grew scarlet. When the evening was over, and just as Ferdinand was going to bed, Birotteau took him into the shop on a pretext of business.

"Du Tillet," said the worthy man, "three thousand francs are missing from the desk. I suspect no one; but the circumstance of the old louis seems too much against you not to oblige me to speak of it. We will not go to bed till we have found where the error lies, – for, after all, it may be only an error. Perhaps you took something on account of your salary?"

Du Tillet said at once that he had taken the louis. The perfumer opened his ledger and found that his clerk's account had not been debited.

"I was in a hurry; but I ought to have made Popinot enter the sum," said Ferdinand.

"That is true," said Birotteau, bewildered by the cool unconcern of the Norman, who well knew the worthy people among whom he had come meaning to make his fortune. The perfumer and his clerk passed the whole night in examining accounts, a labor which the good man knew to be useless. In coming and going about the desk Cesar slipped three bills of a thousand francs each into the money-drawer, catching them against the top of it; then he pretended to be much fatigued and to fall asleep and snore. Du Tillet awoke him triumphantly, with an excessive show of joy at discovering the error. The next day Birotteau scolded Popinot and his little wife publicly, as if very angry with them for their negligence. Fifteen days later Ferdinand du Tillet got a situation with a stockbroker. He said perfumery did not suit him, and he wished to learn banking. In leaving Birotteau, he spoke of Madame Cesar in a way to make people suppose that his master had dismissed him out of jealousy. A few months later, however, du Tillet went to see Birotteau and asked his endorsement for twenty

thousand francs, to enable him to make up the securities he needed in an enterprise which was to put him on the high-road to fortune. Observing the surprise which Cesar showed at this impudence, du Tillet frowned, and asked if he had no confidence in him. Matifat and two other merchants, who were present on business with Birotteau, also observed the indignation of the perfumer, who repressed his anger in their presence. Du Tillet, he thought, might have become an honest man; his previous fault might have been committed for some mistress in distress or from losses at cards; the public reprobation of an honest man might drive one still young, and possibly repentant, into a career of crime. So this angel took up his pen and endorsed du Tillet's notes, telling him that he was heartily willing thus to oblige a lad who had been very useful to him. The blood rushed to his face as he uttered the falsehood. Du Tillet could not meet his eye, and no doubt vowed to him at that moment the undying hatred which the spirits of darkness feel towards the angels of light.

From this time du Tillet held his balance-pole so well as he danced the tight-rope of financial speculation, that he was rich and elegant in appearance before he became so in reality. As soon as he got hold of a cabriolet he was always in it; he kept himself in the high sphere of those who mingle business with pleasure, and make the foyer of the opera-house a branch of the Bourse, – in short, the Turcarets of the period. Thanks to Madame Roguin, whom he had known at the Birotteau's, he was received at once among people of the highest standing in finance; and, at the moment of which we write, he had reached a prosperity in which there was nothing fictitious. He was on the best terms with the house of Nucingen, to which Roguin had introduced him, and he had promptly become connected with the brothers Keller and with several other great banking-houses. No one knew from whence this youth had derived the immense capital which he handled, but every one attributed his success to his intelligence and his integrity.

The Restoration made Cesar a personage, and the turmoil of political crises naturally lessened his recollection of these domestic misadventures. The constancy of his royalist opinions (to which he had become exceedingly indifferent since his wound, though he remained faithful to them out of decency) and the memory of his devotion in Vendemiaire won him very high patronage, precisely because he had asked for none. He was appointed major in the National Guard, although he was utterly incapable of giving the word of command. In 1815 Napoleon, always his enemy, dismissed him. During the Hundred Days Birotteau was the bugbear of the liberals of his quarter; for it was not until 1815 that differences of political opinion grew up among merchants, who had hitherto been unanimous in their desires for public tranquillity, of which, as they knew, business affairs stood much in need.

At the second Restoration the royal government was obliged to remodel the municipality of Paris. The prefect wished to nominate Birotteau as mayor. Thanks to his wife, the perfumer would only accept the place of deputy-mayor, which brought him less before the public. Such modesty increased the respect generally felt for him, and won him the friendship of the new mayor, Monsieur Flamet de la Billardiere. Birotteau, who had seen him in the shop in the days when "The Queen of Roses" was the headquarters of royalist conspiracy, mentioned him to the prefect of the Seine when that official consulted Cesar on the choice to be made. Monsieur and Madame Birotteau were therefore never forgotten in the invitations of the mayor. Madame Birotteau frequently took up the collections at Saint-Roch in the best of good company. La Billardiere warmly supported Birotteau when the question of bestowing the crosses given to the municipality came up, and dwelt upon his wound at Saint-Roch, his attachment to the Bourbons, and the respect which he enjoyed. The government, wishing on the one hand to cheapen Napoleon's order by lavishing the cross of the Legion of honor, and on the other to win adherents and rally to the Bourbons the various trades and men of arts and sciences, included Birotteau in the coming promotion. This honor, which suited well with the show that Cesar made in his arrondissement, put him in a position where the ideas of a man accustomed to succeed naturally enlarged themselves. The news which the mayor had just given him of his preferment was the determining reason that decided him to plunge into the scheme which he

now for the first time revealed to his wife; he believed it would enable him to give up perfumery all the more quickly, and rise into the regions of the higher bourgeoisie of Paris.

Cesar was now forty years old. The work he had undertaken in his manufactories had given him a few premature wrinkles, and had slightly silvered the thick tufts of hair on which the pressure of his hat left a shining circle. His forehead, where the hair grew in a way to mark five distinct points, showed the simplicity of his life. The heavy eyebrows were not alarming because the limpid glance of his frank blue eyes harmonized with the open forehead of an honest man. His nose, broken at the bridge and thick at the end, gave him the wondering look of a gaby in the streets of Paris. His lips were very thick, and his large chin fell in a straight line below them. His face, high-colored and square in outline, revealed, by the lines of its wrinkles and by the general character of its expression, the ingenuous craftiness of a peasant. The strength of his body, the stoutness of his limbs, the squareness of his shoulders, the width of his feet, – all denoted the villager transplanted to Paris. His powerful hairy hands, with their large square nails, would alone have attested his origin if other vestiges had not remained in various parts of his person. His lips wore the cordial smile which shopkeepers put on when a customer enters; but this commercial sunshine was really the image of his inward content, and pictured the state of his kindly soul. His distrust never went beyond the lines of his business, his craftiness left him on the steps of the Bourse, or when he closed the pages of his ledger. Suspicion was to him very much what his printed bill-heads were, – a necessity of the sale itself. His countenance presented a sort of comical assurance and conceit mingled with good nature, which gave it originality and saved it from too close a resemblance to the insipid face of a Parisian bourgeois. Without this air of naive self-admiration and faith in his own person, he would have won too much respect; he drew nearer to his fellows by thus contributing his quota of absurdity. When speaking, he habitually crossed his hands behind his back. When he thought he had said something striking or gallant, he rose imperceptibly on the points of his toes twice, and dropped back heavily on his heels, as if to emphasize what he said. In the midst of an argument he might be seen turning round upon himself and walking off a few steps, as if he had gone to find objections with which he returned upon his adversary brusquely. He never interrupted, and was sometimes a victim to this careful observance of civility; for others would take the words out of his mouth, and the good man had to yield his ground without opening his lips. His great experience in commercial matters had given him a few fixed habits, which some people called eccentricities. If a note were overdue he sent for the bailiff, and thought only of recovering capital, interest, and costs; and the bailiff was ordered to pursue the matter until the debtor went into bankruptcy. Cesar then stopped all proceedings, never appeared at any meeting of creditors, and held on to his securities. He adopted this system and his implacable contempt for bankrupts from Monsieur Ragon, who in the course of his commercial life had seen such loss of time in litigation that he had come to look upon the meagre and uncertain dividends obtained by such compromises as fully counterbalanced by a better employment of the time spent in coming and going, in making proposals, or in listening to excuses for dishonesty.

"If the bankrupt is an honest man, and recovers himself, he will pay you," Ragon would say. "If he is without means and simply unfortunate, why torment him? If he is a scoundrel, you will never get anything. Your known severity will make you seem uncompromising; it will be impossible to negotiate with you; consequently you are the one who will get paid as long as there is anything to pay with."

Cesar came to all appointments at the expected hour; but if he were kept waiting, he left ten minutes later with an inflexibility which nothing ever changed. Thus his punctuality compelled all persons who had dealings with him to be punctual themselves.

The dress adopted by the worthy man was in keeping with his manners and his countenance. No power could have made him give up the white muslin cravats, with ends embroidered by his wife or daughter, which hung down beneath his chin. His waistcoat of white pique, squarely buttoned, came down low over his stomach, which was rather protuberant, for he was somewhat fat. He wore blue

trousers, black silk stockings, and shoes with ribbon ties, which were often unfastened. His surtout coat, olive-green and always too large, and his broad-brimmed hat gave him the air of a Quaker. When he dressed for the Sunday evening festivities he put on silk breeches, shoes with gold buckles, and the inevitable square waistcoat, whose front edges opened sufficiently to show a pleated shirt-frill. His coat, of maroon cloth, had wide flaps and long skirts. Up to the year 1819 he kept up the habit of wearing two watch-chains, which hung down in parallel lines; but he only put on the second when he dressed for the evening.

Such was Cesar Birotteau; a worthy man, to whom the fates presiding at the birth of men had denied the faculty of judging politics and life in their entirety, and of rising above the social level of the middle classes; who followed ignorantly the track of routine, whose opinions were all imposed upon him from the outside and applied by him without examination. Blind but good, not spiritual but deeply religious, he had a pure heart. In that heart there shone one love, the light and strength of his life; for his desire to rise in life, and the limited knowledge he had gained of the world, both came from his affection for his wife and for his daughter.

As for Madame Cesar, then thirty-seven years old, she bore so close a resemblance to the Venus of Milo that all who knew her recognized the likeness when the Duc de Riviere sent the beautiful statue to Paris. In a few months sorrows were to dim with yellowing tints that dazzling fairness, to hollow and blacken the bluish circle round the lovely greenish-gray eyes so cruelly that she then wore the look of an old Madonna; for amid the coming ruin she retained her gentle sincerity, her pure though saddened glance; and no one ever thought her less than a beautiful woman, whose bearing was virtuous and full of dignity. At the ball now planned by Cesar she was to shine with a last lustre of beauty, remarked upon at the time and long remembered.

Every life has its climax, – a period when causes are at work, and are in exact relation to results. This mid-day of life, when living forces find their equilibrium and put forth their productive powers with full effect, is common not only to organized beings but to cities, nations, ideas, institutions, commerce, and commercial enterprises, all of which, like noble races and dynasties, are born and rise and fall. From whence comes the vigor with which this law of growth and decay applies itself to all organized things in this lower world? Death itself, in times of scourge, has periods when it advances, slackens, sinks back, and slumbers. Our globe is perhaps only a rocket a little more continuing than the rest. History, recording the causes of the rise and fall of all things here below, could enlighten man as to the moment when he might arrest the play of all his faculties; but neither the conquerors, nor the actors, nor the women, nor the writers in the great drama will listen to the salutary voice.

Cesar Birotteau, who might with reason think himself at the apogee of his fortunes, used this crucial pause as the point of a new departure. He did not know, moreover neither nations nor kings have attempted to make known in characters ineffaceable, the cause of the vast overthrows with which history teems, and of which so many royal and commercial houses offer signal examples. Why are there no modern pyramids to recall ceaselessly the one principle which dominates the common-weal of nations and of individual life? *When the effect produced is no longer in direct relation nor in equal proportion to the cause, disorganization has begun.* And yet such monuments stand everywhere; it is tradition and the stones of the earth which tell us of the past, which set a seal upon the caprices of indomitable destiny, whose hand wipes out our dreams, and shows us that all great events are summed up in one idea. Troy and Napoleon are but poems. May this present history be the poem of middle-class vicissitudes, to which no voice has given utterance because they have seemed poor in dignity, enormous as they are in volume. It is not one man with whom we are now to deal, but a whole people, or world, of sorrows.

III

Cesar's last thought as he fell asleep was a fear that his wife would make peremptory objections in the morning, and he ordered himself to get up very early and escape them. At the dawn of day he slipped out noiselessly, leaving his wife in bed, dressed quickly, and went down to the shop, just as the boy was taking down the numbered shutters. Birotteau, finding himself alone, the clerks not having appeared, went to the doorway to see how the boy, named Raguet, did his work, – for Birotteau knew all about it from experience. In spite of the sharp air the weather was beautiful.

"Popinot, get your hat, put on your shoes, and call Monsieur Celestin; you and I will go and have a talk in the Tuileries," he said, when he saw Anselme come down.

Popinot, the admirable antipodes of du Tillet, apprenticed to Cesar by one of those lucky chances which lead us to believe in a Sub-Providence, plays so great a part in this history that it becomes absolutely necessary to sketch his profile here. Madame Ragon was a Popinot. She had two brothers. One, the youngest of the family, was at this time a judge in the Lower courts of the Seine, – courts which take cognizance of all civil contests involving sums above a certain amount. The eldest, who was in the wholesale wool-trade, lost his property and died, leaving to the care of Madame Ragon and his brother an only son, who had lost his mother at his birth. To give him a trade, Madame Ragon placed her nephew at "The Queen of Roses," hoping he might some day succeed Birotteau. Anselme Popinot was a little fellow and club-footed, – an infirmity bestowed by fate on Lord Byron, Walter Scott, and Monsieur de Talleyrand, that others so afflicted might suffer no discouragement. He had the brilliant skin, with frequent blotches, which belongs to persons with red hair; but his clear brow, his eyes the color of a grey-veined agate, his pleasant mouth, his fair complexion, the charm of his modest youth and the shyness which grew out of his deformity, all inspired feelings of protection in those who knew him: we love the weak, and Popinot was loved. Little Popinot – everybody called him so – belonged to a family essentially religious, whose virtues were intelligent, and whose lives were simple and full of noble actions. The lad himself, brought up by his uncle the judge, presented a union of qualities which are the beauty of youth; good and affectionate, a little shame-faced though full of eagerness, gentle as a lamb but energetic in his work, devoted and sober, he was endowed with the virtues of a Christian in the early ages of the Church.

When he heard of a walk in the Tuileries, – certainly the most eccentric proposal that his august master could have made to him at that hour of the day, – Popinot felt sure that he must intend to speak to him about setting up in business. He thought suddenly of Cesarine, the true queen of roses, the living sign of the house, whom he had loved from the day when he was taken into Birotteau's employ, two months before the advent of du Tillet. As he went upstairs he was forced to pause; his heart swelled, his arteries throbbed violently. However, he soon came down again, followed by Celestin, the head-clerk. Anselme and his master turned without a word in the direction of the Tuileries.

Popinot was twenty-one years old. Birotteau himself had married at that age. Anselme therefore could see no hindrance to his marriage with Cesarine, though the wealth of the perfumer and the beauty of the daughter were immense obstacles in the path of his ambitious desires: but love gets onward by leaps of hope, and the more absurd they are the greater faith it has in them; the farther off was the mistress of Anselme's heart, the more ardent became his desires. Happy the youth who in those levelling days when all hats looked alike, had contrived to create a sense of distance between the daughter of a perfumer and himself, the scion of an old Parisian family! In spite of all his doubts and fears he was happy; did he not dine every day beside Cesarine? So, while attending to the business of the house, he threw a zeal and energy into his work which deprived it of all hardship; doing it for the sake of Cesarine, nothing tired him. Love, in a youth of twenty, feeds on devotion.

"He is a true merchant; he will succeed," Cesar would say to Madame Ragon, as he praised Anselme's activity in preparing the work at the factory, or boasted of his readiness in learning the

niceties of the trade, or recalled his arduous labors when shipments had to be made, and when, with his sleeves rolled up and his arms bare, the lame lad packed and nailed up, himself alone, more cases than all the other clerks put together.

The well-known and avowed intentions of Alexandre Crottat, head-clerk to Roguin, and the wealth of his father, a rich farmer of Brie, were certainly obstacles in the lad's way; but even these were not the hardest to conquer. Popinot buried in the depths of his heart a sad secret, which widened the distance between Cesarine and himself. The property of the Ragons, on which he might have counted, was involved, and the orphan lad had the satisfaction of enabling them to live by making over to them his meagre salary. Yet with all these drawbacks he believed in success! He had sometimes caught a glance of dignified approval from Cesarine; in the depths of her blue eyes he had dared to read a secret thought full of caressing hopes. He now walked beside Cesar, heaving with these ideas, trembling, silent, agitated, as any young lad might well have been by such an occurrence in the burgeoning time of youth.

"Popinot," said the worthy man, "is your aunt well?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"She has seemed rather anxious lately. Does anything trouble her? Listen, my boy; you must not be too reticent with me. I am half one of the family. I have known your uncle Ragon thirty-five years. I went to him in hob-nailed shoes, just as I came from my village. That place is called Les Tresorieres, but I can tell you that all my worldly goods were one louis, given me by my godmother the late Marquise d'Uxelles, a relation of Monsieur le Duc and Madame la Duchesse de Lenoncourt, who are now customers of ours. I pray every Sunday for her and for all her family; I send yearly to her niece in Touraine, Madame de Mortsauf, all her perfumery. I get a good deal of custom through them; there's Monsieur de Vandenesse who spends twelve hundred francs a year with us. If I were not grateful out of good feeling, I ought to be so out of policy; but as for you Anselme, I wish you well for you own sake, and without any other thought."

"Ah, monsieur! if you will allow me to say so, you have got a head of gold."

"No, no, my boy, that's not it. I don't say that my head-piece isn't as good as another's; but the thing is, I've been honest, —*tenaciously*! I've kept to good conduct; I never loved any woman except my wife. Love is a famous *vehicle*, – happy word used by Monsieur Villele in the tribune yesterday."

"Love!" exclaimed Popinot. "Oh, monsieur! can it be – "

"Bless me! there's Pere Roguin, on foot at this hour, at the top of the Place Louis XV. I wonder what he is doing there!" thought Cesar, forgetting all about Anselme and the oil of nuts.

The suspicions of his wife came back to his mind; and instead of turning in to the Tuileries Gardens, Birotteau walked on to meet the notary. Anselme followed his master at a distance, without being able to define the reason why he suddenly felt an interest in a matter so apparently unimportant, and full of joy at the encouragement he derived from Cesar's mention of the hob-nailed shoes, the one louis, and love.

In times gone by, Roguin – a large stout man, with a pimpled face, a very bald forehead, and black hair – had not been wanting in a certain force of character and countenance. He had once been young and daring; beginning as a mere clerk, he had risen to be a notary; but at this period his face showed, to the eyes of an observer, certain haggard lines, and an expression of weariness in the pursuit of pleasure. When a man plunges into the mire of excesses it is seldom that his face shows no trace of it. In the present instance the lines of the wrinkles and the heat of the complexion were markedly ignoble. Instead of the pure glow which suffuses the tissues of a virtuous man and stamps them, as it were, with the flower of health, the impurities of his blood could be seen to master the soundness of his body. His nose was ignominiously shortened like those of men in whom scrofulous humors, attacking that organ, produce a secret infirmity which a virtuous queen of France innocently believed to be a misfortune common to the whole human race, for she had never approached any man but the king sufficiently near to become aware of her blunder. Roguin hoped to conceal this

misfortune by the excessive use of snuff, but he only increased the trouble which was the principal cause of his disasters.

Is it not a too-prolonged social flattery to paint men forever under false colors, and never to reveal the actual causes which underlie their vicissitudes, caused as they so often are by maladies? Physical evil, considered under the aspect of its moral ravages, examined as to its influence upon the mechanism of life, has been perhaps too much neglected by the historians of the social kingdom. Madame Cesar had guessed the secret of Roguin's household.

From the night of her marriage, the charming and only daughter of the banker Chevrel conceived for the unhappy notary an insurmountable antipathy, and wished to apply at once for a divorce. But Roguin, happy in obtaining a rich wife with five hundred thousand francs of her own, to say nothing of expectations, entreated her not to institute an action for divorce, promising to leave her free, and to accept all the consequences of such an agreement. Madame Roguin thus became sovereign mistress of the situation, and treated her husband as a courtesan treats an elderly lover. Roguin soon found his wife too expensive, and like other Parisian husbands he set up a private establishment of his own, keeping the cost, in the first instance, within the limits of moderate expenditure. In the beginning he encountered, at no great expense, grisettes who were glad of his protection; but for the past three years he had fallen a prey to one of those unconquerable passions which sometimes invade the whole being of a man between fifty and sixty years of age. It was roused by a magnificent creature known as *la belle Hollandaise* in the annals of prostitution, for into that gulf she was to fall back and become a noted personage through her death. She was originally brought from Bruges by a client of Roguin, who soon after left Paris in consequence of political events, presenting her to the notary in 1815. Roguin bought a house for her in the Champs-Elysees, furnished it handsomely, and in trying to satisfy her costly caprices had gradually eaten up his whole fortune.

The gloomy look on the notary's face, which he hastened to lay aside when he saw Birotteau, grew out of certain mysterious circumstances which were at the bottom of the secret fortune so rapidly acquired by du Tillet. The scheme originally planned by that adventurer had changed on the first Sunday when he saw, at Birotteau's house, the relations existing between Monsieur and Madame Roguin. He had come there not so much to seduce Madame Cesar as to obtain the offer of her daughter's hand by way of compensation for frustrated hopes, and he found little difficulty in renouncing his purpose when he discovered that Cesar, whom he supposed to be rich, was in point of fact comparatively poor. He set a watch on the notary, wormed himself into his confidence, was presented to la belle Hollandaise, made a study of their relation to each other, and soon found that she threatened to renounce her lover if he limited her luxuries. La belle Hollandaise was one of those mad-cap women who care nothing as to where the money comes from, or how it is obtained, and who are capable of giving a ball with the gold obtained by a parricide. She never thought of the morrow; for her the future was after dinner, and the end of the month eternity, even if she had bills to pay. Du Tillet, delighted to have found such a lever, exacted from la belle Hollandaise a promise that she would love Roguin for thirty thousand francs a year instead of fifty thousand, – a service which infatuated old men seldom forget.

One evening, after a supper where the wine flowed freely, Roguin unbosomed himself to du Tillet on the subject of his financial difficulties. His own estate was tied up and legally settled on his wife, and he had been led by his fatal passion to take from the funds entrusted to him by his clients a sum which was already more than half their amount. When the whole were gone, the unfortunate man intended to blow out his brains, hoping to mitigate the disgrace of his conduct by making a demand upon public pity. A fortune, rapid and secure, darted before du Tillet's eyes like a flash of lightning in a saturnalian night. He promptly reassured Roguin, and made him fire his pistols into the air.

"With such risks as yours," he said, "a man of your calibre should not behave like a fool and walk on tiptoe, but speculate – boldly."

He advised Roguin to take a large sum from the remaining trust-moneys and give it to him, du Tillet, with permission to stake it bravely on some large operation, either at the Bourse, or in one of the thousand enterprises of private speculation then about to be launched. Should he win, they were to form a banking-house, where they could turn to good account a portion of the deposits, while the profits could be used by Roguin for his pleasures. If luck went against them, Roguin was to get away and live in foreign countries, and trust to *his friend* du Tillet, who would be faithful to him to the last sou. It was a rope thrown to a drowning man, and Roguin did not perceive that the perfumer's clerk had flung it round his neck.

Master of Roguin's secret, du Tillet made use of it to establish his power over wife, mistress, and husband. Madame Roguin, when told of a disaster she was far from suspecting, accepted du Tillet's attentions, who about this time left his situation with Birotteau, confident of future success. He found no difficulty in persuading the mistress to risk a certain sum of money as a provision against the necessity of resorting to prostitution if misfortunes overtook her. The wife, on the other hand, regulated her accounts, and gathered together quite a little capital, which she gave to the man whom her husband confided in; for by this time the notary had given a hundred thousand francs of the remaining trust-money to his accomplice. Du Tillet's relations to Madame Roguin then became such that her interest in him was transformed into affection and finally into a violent passion. Through his three sleeping-partners Ferdinand naturally derived a profit; but not content with that profit, he had the audacity, when gambling at the Bourse in their name, to make an agreement with a pretended adversary, a man of straw, from whom he received back for himself certain sums which he had charged as losses to his clients. As soon as he had gained fifty thousand francs he was sure of fortune. He had the eye of an eagle to discern the phases through which France was then passing. He played low during the campaign of the allied armies, and high on the restoration of the Bourbons. Two months after the return of Louis XVIII., Madame Roguin was worth two hundred thousand francs, du Tillet three hundred thousand, and the notary had been able to get his accounts once more into order.

La belle Hollandaise wasted her share of the profits; for she was secretly a prey to an infamous scoundrel named Maxime de Trailles, a former page of the Emperor. Du Tillet discovered the real name of this woman in drawing out a deed. She was Sarah Gobseck. Struck by the coincidence of the name with that of a well-known usurer, he went to the old money-lender (that providence of young men of family) to find out how far he would back the credit of his relation. The Brutus of usurers was implacable towards his great-niece, but du Tillet himself pleased him by posing as Sarah's banker, and having funds to invest. The Norman nature and the rapacious nature suited each other. Gobseck happened to want a clever young man to examine into an affair in a foreign country. It chanced that an auditor of the Council of State, overtaken by the return of the Bourbons and anxious to stand well at court, had gone to Germany and bought up all the debts contracted by the princes during the emigration. He now offered the profits of the affair, which to him was merely political, to any one who would reimburse him. Gobseck would pay no money down, unless in proportion to the redemption of the debts, and insisted on a careful examination of the affair. Usurers never trust any one; they demand vouchers. With them the bird in the hand is everything; icy when they have no need of a man, they are wheedling and inclined to be gracious when they can make him useful.

Du Tillet knew the enormous underground part played in the world by such men as Werbrust and Gigonnet, commercial money-lenders in the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin; by Palma, banker in the Faubourg Poissonniere, – all of whom were closely connected with Gobseck. He accordingly offered a cash security, and obtained an interest in the affair, on condition that these gentlemen would use in their commercial loans certain moneys he should place in their hands. By this means he strengthened himself with a solid support on all sides.

Du Tillet accompanied Monsieur Clement Chardin des Lupeaulx to Germany during the Hundred Days, and came back at the second Restoration, having done more to increase his means of making a fortune than augmented the fortune itself. He was now in the secret councils of the

sharpest speculators in Paris; he had secured the friendship of the man with whom he had examined into the affair of the debts, and that clever juggler had laid bare to him the secrets of legal and political science. Du Tillet possessed one of those minds which understand at half a word, and he completed his education during his travels in Germany. On his return he found Madame Roguin faithful to him. As to the notary, he longed for Ferdinand with as much impatience as his wife did, for la belle Hollandaise had once more ruined him. Du Tillet questioned the woman, but could find no outlay equal to the sum dissipated. It was then that he discovered the secret which Sarah had carefully concealed from him, – her mad passion for Maxime de Trailles, whose earliest steps in a career of vice showed him for what he was, one of those good-for-nothing members of the body politic who seem the necessary evil of all good government, and whose love of gambling renders them insatiable. On making this discovery, du Tillet at once saw the reason of Gobseck's insensibility to the claims of his niece.

Under these circumstances du Tillet the banker (for Ferdinand was now a banker) advised Roguin to lay up something against a rainy day, by persuading his clients to invest in some enterprise which might enable him to put by for himself large sums of money, in case he were forced to go into bankruptcy through the affairs of the bank. After many ups and downs, which were profitable to none but Madame Roguin and du Tillet, Roguin heard the fatal hour of his insolvency and final ruin strike. His misery was then worked upon by his faithful friend. Ferdinand invented the speculation in lands about the Madeleine. The hundred thousand francs belonging to Cesar Birotteau, which were in the hands of the notary, were made over to du Tillet; for the latter, whose object was to ruin the perfumer, had made Roguin understand that he would run less risk if he got his nearest friends into the net. "A friend," he said, "is more considerate, even if angry."

Few people realize to-day how little value the lands about the Madeleine had at the period of which we write; but at that time they were likely to be sold even below their then value, because of the difficulty of finding purchasers willing to wait for the profits of the enterprise. Now, du Tillet's aim was to seize the profits speedily without the losses of a protracted speculation. In other words, his plan was to strangle the speculation and get hold of it as a dead thing, which he might galvanize back to life when it suited him. In such a scheme the Gobsecks, Palmas, and Werbrusts would have been ready to lend a hand, but du Tillet was not yet sufficiently intimate with them to ask their aid; besides, he wanted to hide his own hand in conducting the affair, that he might get the profits of his theft without the shame of it. He felt the necessity of having under his thumb one of those living lay-figures called in commercial language a "man of straw." His former tool at the Bourse struck him as a suitable person for the post; he accordingly trenched upon Divine right, and created a man. Out of a former commercial traveller, who was without means or capacity of any kind, except that of talking indefinitely on all subjects and saying nothing, who was without a farthing or a chance to make one, – able, nevertheless, to understand a part and act it without compromising the play or the actors in it, and possessed of a rare sort of honor, that of keeping a secret and letting himself be dishonored to screen his employers, – out of such a being du Tillet now made a banker, who set on foot and directed vast enterprises; the head, namely, of the house of Claparon.

The fate of Charles Claparon would be, if du Tillet's scheme ended in bankruptcy, a swift deliverance to the tender mercies of Jews and Pharisees; and he well knew it. But to a poor devil who was despondently roaming the boulevard with a future of forty sous in his pocket when his old comrade du Tillet chanced to meet him, the little gains that he was to get out of the affair seemed an Eldorado. His friendship, his devotion, to du Tillet, increased by unreflecting gratitude and stimulated by the wants of a libertine and vagabond life, led him to say *amen* to everything. Having sold his honor, he saw it risked with so much caution that he ended by attaching himself to his old comrade as a dog to his master. Claparon was an ugly poodle, but as ready to jump as Curtius. In the present affair he was to represent half the purchasers of the land, while Cesar Birotteau represented the other half. The notes which Claparon was to receive from Birotteau were to be discounted by one of the usurers

whose name du Tillet was authorized to use, and this would send Cesar headlong into bankruptcy so soon as Roguin had drawn from him his last funds. The assignees of the failure would, as du Tillet felt certain, follow his cue; and he, already possessed of the property paid over by the perfumer and his associates, could sell the lands at auction and buy them in at half their value with the funds of Roguin and the assets of the failure. The notary went into this scheme believing that he should enrich himself by the spoliation of Birotteau and his copartners; but the man in whose power he had placed himself intended to take, and eventually did take, the lion's share. Roguin, unable to sue du Tillet in any of the courts, was glad of the bone flung to him, month by month, in the recesses of Switzerland, where he found nymphs at a reduction. Circumstances, actual facts, and not the imagination of a tragic author inventing a catastrophe, gave birth to this horrible scheme. Hatred without a thirst for vengeance is like a seed falling on stony ground; but vengeance vowed to a Cesar by a du Tillet is a natural movement of the soul. If it were not, then we must deny the warfare between the angels of light and the spirits of darkness.

Du Tillet could not very easily assassinate the man who knew him to be guilty of a petty theft, but he could fling him into the mire and annihilate him so completely that his word and testimony would count for nothing. For a long time revenge had germinated in his heart without budding; for the men who hate most are usually those who have little time in Paris to make plans; life is too fast, too full, too much at the mercy of unexpected events. But such perpetual changes, though they hinder premeditation, nevertheless offer opportunity to thoughts lurking in the depths of a purpose which is strong enough to lie in wait for their tidal chances. When Roguin first confided his troubles to du Tillet, the latter had vaguely foreseen the possibility of destroying Cesar, and he was not mistaken. Forced at last to give up his mistress, the notary drank the dregs of his philter from a broken chalice. He went every day to the Champs Elysees returning home early in the morning. The suspicions of Madame Cesar were justified.

From the moment when a man consents to play the part which du Tillet had allotted to Roguin, he develops the talents of a comedian; he has the eye of a lynx and the penetration of a seer; he magnetizes his dupe. The notary had seen Birotteau some time before Birotteau had caught sight of him; when the perfumer did see him, Roguin held out his hand before they met.

"I have just been to make the will of a great personage who has only eight days to live," he said, with an easy manner. "They have treated me like a country doctor, – fetched me in a carriage, and let me walk home on foot."

These words chased away the slight shade of suspicion which clouded the face of the perfumer, and which Roguin had been quick to perceive. The notary was careful not to be the first to mention the land speculation; his part was to deal the last blow.

"After wills come marriage contracts," said Birotteau. "Such is life. Apropos, when do we marry the Madeleine? Hey! hey! papa Roguin," he added, tapping the notary on the stomach.

Among men the most chaste of bourgeois have the ambition to appear rakish.

"Well, if it is not to-day," said the notary, with a diplomatic air, "then never. We are afraid that the affair may get wind. I am much urged by two of my wealthiest clients, who want a share in this speculation. There it is, to take or leave. This morning I shall draw the deeds. You have till one o'clock to make up your mind. Adieu; I am just on my way to read over the rough draft which Xandrot has been making out during the night."

"Well, my mind is made up. I pass my word," said Birotteau, running after the notary and seizing his hand. "Take the hundred thousand francs which were laid by for my daughter's portion."

"Very good," said Roguin, leaving him.

For a moment, as Birotteau turned to rejoin little Popinot, he felt a fierce heat in his entrails, the muscles of his stomach contracted, his ears buzzed.

"What is the matter, monsieur?" asked the clerk, when he saw his master's pale face.

"Ah, my lad! I have just with one word decided on a great undertaking; no man is master of himself at such a moment. You are a party to it. In fact, I brought you here that we might talk of it at our ease; no one can overhear us. Your aunt is in trouble; how did she lose her money? Tell me."

"Monsieur, my uncle and aunt put all their property into the hands of Monsieur de Nucingen, and they were forced to accept as security certain shares in the mines at Wortschin, which as yet pay no dividends; and it is hard at their age to live on hope."

"How do they live, then?"

"They do me the great pleasure of accepting my salary."

"Right, right, Anselme!" said the perfumer, as a tear rolled down his cheek. "You are worthy of the regard I feel for you. You are about to receive a great recompense for your fidelity to my interests."

As he said these words the worthy man swelled in his own eyes as much as he did in those of Popinot, and he uttered them with a plebeian and naive emphasis which was the genuine expression of his counterfeit superiority.

"Ah, monsieur! have you guessed my love for – "

"For whom?" asked his master.

"For Mademoiselle Cesarine."

"Ah, boy, you are bold indeed!" exclaimed Birotteau. "Keep your secret. I promise to forget it. You leave my house to-morrow. I am not angry with you; in your place – the devil! the devil! – I should have done the same. She is so lovely!"

"Oh, monsieur!" said the clerk, who felt his shirt getting wet with perspiration.

"My boy, this matter is not one to be settled in a day. Cesarine is her own mistress, and her mother has fixed ideas. Control yourself, wipe your eyes, hold your heart in hand, and don't let us talk any more about it. I should not blush to have you for my son-in-law. The nephew of Monsieur Popinot, a judge of the civil courts, nephew of the Ragons, you have the right to make your way as well as anybody; but there are *buts* and *ifs* and *hows* and *whys*. What a devil of a dog you have let loose upon me, in the midst of a business conversation! Here, sit down on that chair, and let the lover give place to the clerk. Popinot, are you a loyal man?" he said, looking fixedly at the youth. "Do you feel within you the nerve to struggle with something stronger than yourself, and fight hand to hand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"To maintain a long and dangerous battle?"

"What for?"

"To destroy Macassar Oil!" said Birotteau, rising on his toes like a hero in Plutarch. "Let us not mistake; the enemy is strong, well entrenched, formidable! Macassar Oil has been vigorously launched. The conception was strong. The square bottles were original; I have thought of making ours triangular. Yet on the whole I prefer, after ripe reflection, smaller bottles of thin glass, encased in wicker; they would have a mysterious look, and customers like things which puzzle them."

"They would be expensive," said Popinot. "We must get things out as cheap as we can, so as to make a good reduction at wholesale."

"Good, my lad! That's the right principle. But now, think of it. Macassar Oil will defend itself; it is specious; the name is seductive. It is offered as a foreign importation; and we have the ill-luck to belong to our own country. Come, Popinot, have you the courage to kill Macassar? Then begin the fight in foreign lands. It seems that Macassar is really in the Indies. Now, isn't it much better to supply a French product to the Indians than to send them back what they are supposed to send to us? Make the venture. Begin the fight in India, in foreign countries, in the departments. Macassar Oil has been thoroughly advertised; we must not underrate its power, it has been pushed everywhere, the public knows it."

"I'll kill it!" cried Popinot, with fire in his eyes.

"What with?" said Birotteau. "That's the way with ardent young people. Listen till I've done."

Anselme fell into position like a soldier presenting arms to a marshal of France.

"Popinot, I have invented an oil to stimulate the growth of hair, to titillate the scalp, to revive the color of male and female tresses. This cosmetic will not be less successful than my Paste or my Lotion. But I don't intend to work it myself. I think of retiring from business. It is you, my boy, who are to launch my Oil Comagene, – from the latin word *coma*, which signifies 'hair,' as Monsieur Alibert, the King's physician, says. The word is found in the tragedy of Berenice, where Racine introduces a king of Comagene, lover of the queen so celebrated for the beauty of her hair; the king – no doubt as a delicate flattery – gave the name to his country. What wit and intellect there is in genius! it condescends to the minutest details."

Little Popinot kept his countenance as he listened to this absurd flourish, evidently said for his benefit as an educated young man.

"Anselme, I have cast my eyes upon you as the one to found a commercial house in the high-class druggist line, Rue des Lombards. I will be your secret partner, and supply the funds to start with. After the Oil Comagene, we will try an essence of vanilla and the spirit of peppermint. We'll tackle the drug-trade by revolutionizing it, by selling its products concentrated instead of selling them raw. Ambitious young man, are you satisfied?"

Anselme could not answer, his heart was full; but his eyes, filled with tears, answered for him. The offer seemed prompted by indulgent fatherhood, saying to him: "Deserve Cesarine by becoming rich and respected."

"Monsieur," he answered at last, "I will succeed!"

"That's what I said at your age," cried the perfumer; "that was my motto. If you don't win my daughter, at least you will win your fortune. Eh, boy! what is it?"

"Let me hope that in acquiring the one I may obtain the other."

"I can't prevent you from hoping, my friend," said Birotteau, touched by Anselme's tone.

"Well, then, monsieur, can I begin to-day to look for a shop, so as to start at once?"

"Yes, my son. To-morrow we will shut ourselves up in the workshop, you and I. Before you go to the Rue des Lombards, call at Livingston's and see if my hydraulic press will be ready to use to-morrow morning. To-night we will go, about dinner-time, to the good and illustrious Monsieur Vauquelin and consult him. He has lately been employed in studying the composition of hair; he has discovered the nature of the coloring matter and whence it comes; also the structure of the hair itself. The secret is just there, Popinot, and you shall know it; all we have to do is to work it out cleverly. Before you go to Livingston's, just stop at Pieri Berard's. My lad, the disinterested kindness of Monsieur Vauquelin is one of the sorrows of my life. I cannot make him accept any return. Happily, I found out from Chiffreville that he wished for the Dresden Madonna, engraved by a man named Muller. After two years correspondence with Germany, Berard has at last found one on Chinese paper before lettering. It cost fifteen hundred francs, my boy. To-day, my benefactor will see it in his antechamber when he bows us out; it is to be all framed, and I want you to see about it. We – that is, my wife and I – shall thus recall ourselves to his mind; as for gratitude, we have prayed to God for him daily for sixteen years. I can never forget him; but you see, Popinot, men buried in the depths of science do forget everything, – wives, friends, and those they have benefited. As for us plain people, our lack of mind keeps our hearts warm at any rate. That's the consolation for not being a great man. Look at those gentlemen of the Institute, – all brain; you will never meet one of them in a church. Monsieur Vauquelin is tied to his study or his laboratory; but I like to believe he thinks of God in analyzing the works of His hands. – Now, then, it is understood; I give you the money and put you in possession of my secret; we will go shares, and there's no need for any papers between us. Hurrah for success! we'll act in concert. Off with you, my boy! As for me, I've got my part to attend to. One minute, Popinot. I give a great ball three weeks hence; get yourself a dress-coat, and look like a merchant already launched."

This last kindness touched Popinot so deeply that he caught Cesar's big hand and kissed it; the worthy soul had flattered the lover by this confidence, and people in love are capable of anything.

"Poor boy!" thought Birotteau, as he watched him hurrying across the Tuileries. "Suppose Cesarine should love him? But he is lame, and his hair is the color of a warming-pan. Young girls are queer; still, I don't think that Cesarine – And then her mother wants to see her the wife of a notary. Alexandre Crottat can make her rich; wealth makes everything bearable, and there is no happiness that won't give way under poverty. However, I am resolved to leave my daughter mistress of herself, even if it seems a folly."

IV

Birotteau's neighbor was a small dealer in umbrellas, parasols, and canes, named Cayron, – a man from Languedoc, doing a poor business, whom Cesar had several times befriended. Cayron wished nothing better than to confine himself to the ground-floor and let the rich perfumer take the floor above it, thus diminishing his rent.

"Well, neighbor," said Birotteau familiarly, as he entered the man's shop, "my wife consents to the enlargement of our premises. If you like, we will go and see Monsieur Molineux at eleven o'clock."

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," said the umbrella-man, "I have not asked you any compensation for this cession; but you are aware that a good merchant ought to make money out of everything."

"What the devil!" cried Birotteau. "I'm not made of money. I don't know that my architect can do the thing at all. He told me that before concluding my arrangements I must know whether the floors were on the same level. Then, supposing Monsieur Molineux does allow me to cut a door in the wall, is it a party-wall? Moreover, I have to turn my staircase, and make a new landing, so as to get a passage-way on the same floor. All that costs money, and I don't want to ruin myself."

"Oh, monsieur," said the southerner. "Before you are ruined, the sun will have married the earth and they'll have had children."

Birotteau stroked his chin, rose on the points of his toes, and fell back upon his heels.

"Besides," resumed Cayron, "all I ask you to do is to cash these securities for me – "

And he held out sixteen notes amounting in all to five thousand francs.

"Ah!" said the perfumer turning them over. "Small fry, two months, three months – "

"Take them as low as six per cent," said the umbrella-man humbly.

"Am I a usurer?" asked the perfumer reproachfully.

"What can I do, monsieur? I went to your old clerk, du Tillet, and he would not take them at any price. No doubt he wanted to find out how much I'd be willing to lose on them."

"I don't know those signatures," said the perfumer.

"We have such queer names in canes and umbrellas; they belong to the peddlers."

"Well, I won't say that I will take all; but I'll manage the short ones."

"For the want of a thousand francs – sure to be repaid in four months – don't throw me into the hands of the blood-suckers who get the best of our profits; do take all, monsieur! I do so little in the way of discount that I have no credit; that is what kills us little retailers."

"Well, I'll cash your notes; Celestin will make out the account. Be ready at eleven, will you? There's my architect, Monsieur Grindot," said the perfumer, catching sight of the young man, with whom he had made an appointment at Monsieur de la Billardiere's the night before.

"Contrary to the custom of men of talent you are punctual, monsieur," said Cesar, displaying his finest commercial graces. "If punctuality, in the words of our king, – a man of wit as well as a statesman, – is the politeness of princes, it is also the wealth of merchants. Time, time is gold, especially to you artists. I permit myself to say to you that architecture is the union of all the arts. We will not enter through the shop," he added, opening the private door of his house.

Four years earlier Monsieur Grindot had carried off the *grand prix* in architecture, and had lately returned from Rome where he had spent three years at the cost of the State. In Italy the young man had dreamed of art; in Paris he thought of fortune. Government alone can pay the needful millions to raise an architect to glory; it is therefore natural that every ambitious youth of that calling, returning from Rome and thinking himself a Fontaine or a Percier, should bow before the administration. The liberal student became a royalist, and sought to win the favor of influential persons. When a *grand prix* man behaves thus, his comrades call him a trimmer. The young architect in question had two ways open to him, – either to serve the perfumer well, or put him under contribution. Birotteau the deputy-mayor, Birotteau the future possessor of half the lands about the

Madeleine, where he would sooner or later build up a fine neighborhood, was a man to keep on good terms with. Grindot accordingly resolved to sacrifice his immediate gains to his future interests. He listened patiently to the plans, the repetitions, and the ideas of this worthy specimen of the bourgeois class, the constant butt of the witty shafts and ridicule of artists, and the object of their everlasting contempt, nodding his head as if to show the perfumer that he caught his ideas. When Cesar had thoroughly explained everything, the young man proceeded to sum up for him his own plan.

"You have now three front windows on the first floor, besides the window on the staircase which lights the landing; to these four windows you mean to add two on the same level in the next house, by turning the staircase, so as to open a way from one house to the other on the street side."

"You have understood me perfectly," said the perfumer, surprised.

"To carry out your plan, you must light the new staircase from above, and manage to get a porter's lodge beneath it."

"Beneath it?"

"Yes, the space over which it rests – "

"I understand, monsieur."

"As for your own appartement, give me carte-blanche to arrange and decorate it. I wish to make it worthy – "

"Worthy! You have said the word, monsieur."

"How much time do you give me to complete the work?"

"Twenty days."

"What sum do you mean to put in the workmen's pockets?" asked Grindot.

"How much do you think it will cost?"

"An architect can estimate on a new building almost to a farthing," answered the young man; "but as I don't know how to deal with a bourgeois – ah! excuse me, monsieur, the word slipped out – I must warn you that it is impossible to calculate the costs of tearing down and rebuilding. It will take at least eight days before I can give even an approximate idea of them. Trust yourself to me: you shall have a charming staircase, lighted from above, with a pretty vestibule opening from the street, and in the space under the stairway – "

"Must that be used?"

"Don't be worried – I will find room for a little porter's lodge. Your house shall be studied and remodelled *con amore*. Yes, monsieur, I look to art and not to fortune. Above all things I do not want fame before I have earned it. To my mind, the best means of winning credit is not to play into the hands of contractors, but to get at good effects cheaply."

"With such ideas, young man," said Birotteau in a patronizing tone, "you will succeed."

"Therefore," resumed Grindot, "employ the masons, painters, locksmiths, carpenters, and upholsterers yourself. I will simply look over their accounts. Pay me only two thousand francs commission. It will be money well laid out. Give me the premises to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and have your workmen on the spot."

"How much it will cost, at a rough guess?" said Birotteau.

"From ten to twelve thousand francs," said Grindot. "That does not count the furniture; of course you will renew that. Give me the address of your cabinet-maker; I shall have to arrange with him about the choice of colors, so as to have everything in keeping."

"Monsieur Braschon, Rue Saint-Antoine, takes my orders," said Birotteau, assuming a ducal air.

The architect wrote down the address in one of those pretty note-books which invariably come from women.

"Well," said Birotteau, "I trust to you, monsieur; only you must wait till the lease of the adjoining house is made over to me, and I will get permission to cut through the wall."

"Send me a note this evening," said the architect; "it will take me all night to draw the plans – we would rather work for a bourgeois than for the King of Prussia, that is to say for ourselves. I will now take the dimensions, the pitch, the size of the widows, the pictures – "

"It must be finished on the appointed day," said Birotteau. "If not, no pay."

"It shall be done," said the architect. "The workmen must do without sleep; we will use drying oil in the paint. But don't let yourself be taken in by the contractors; always ask their price in advance, and have a written agreement."

"Paris is the only place in the world where you can wave a magic wand like that," said Birotteau, with an Asiatic gesture worthy of the Arabian Nights. "You will do me the honor to come to my ball, monsieur? Men of talent are not all disdainful of commerce; and you will meet a scientific man of the first order, Monsieur Vauquelin of the Institute; also Monsieur de la Billardiere, Monsieur le comte de Fontaine, Monsieur Lebas, judge and president of the Court of commerce, various magistrates, Monsieur le comte de Grandville of the royal suite, Monsieur Camusot of the Court of commerce, and Monsieur Cardot, his father-in-law, and, perhaps, Monsieur le duc de Lenoncourt, first gentleman of the bed-chamber to the king. I assemble my friends as much – to celebrate the emancipation of our territory – as to commemorate my – promotion to the order of the Legion of honor," – here Grindot made a curious gesture. "Possibly I showed myself worthy of that – signal – and royal – favor, by my services on the bench, and by fighting for the Bourbons upon the steps of Saint-Roch on the 13th Vendemiaire, where I was wounded by Napoleon. These claims – "

Constance, in a morning gown, here came out of her daughter's bedroom, where she had been dressing; her first glance cut short Cesar's eloquence just as he was about to formulate in flowing phrase, though modestly, the tale of his merits.

"*Tiens, Mimi*, this is Monsieur *de* Grindot, a young man distinguished in his own sphere of life, and the possessor of a great talent. Monsieur is the architect recommended to us by Monsieur de la Billardiere to superintend our *little* alteration."

The perfumer slipped behind his wife and made a sign to the architect to take notice of the word *little*, putting his finger on his lips. Grindot took the cue.

"Will it be very expensive?" said Constance to the architect.

"Oh, no, madame; six thousand francs at a rough guess."

"A rough guess!" exclaimed Madame Birotteau. "Monsieur, I entreat you, begin nothing without an estimate and the specifications signed. I know the ways of contractors: six thousand francs means twenty thousand. We are not in a position to commit such extravagance. I beg you, monsieur, – though of course my husband is master in his own house, – give him time to reflect."

"Madame, monsieur the deputy-mayor has ordered me to deliver the premises, all finished, in twenty days. If we delay, you will be likely to incur the expense without obtaining the looked-for result."

"There are expenses and expenses," said the handsome mistress of "The Queen of Roses."

"Ah! madame, do you think an architect who seeks to put up public buildings finds it glorious to decorate a mere appartement? I have come down to such details merely to oblige Monsieur de la Billardiere; and if you fear – "

Here he made a movement to retreat.

"Well, well, monsieur," said Constance re-entering her daughter's room, where she threw her head on Cesarine's shoulder.

"Ah, my daughter!" she cried, "your father will ruin himself! He has engaged an architect with mustachios, who talks about public buildings! He is going to pitch the house out of windows and build us a Louvre. Cesar is never idle about his follies; he only spoke to me about it in the night, and he begins it in the morning!"

“Never mind, mamma; let papa do as he likes. The good God has always taken care of him,” said Cesarine, kissing her mother and sitting down to the piano, to let the architect know that the perfumer’s daughter was not ignorant of the fine arts.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.