

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF
MARRIAGE, PART 2

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Содержание

MEANS OF DEFENCE, INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR	4
MEDITATION X	5
MEDITATION XI	18
MEDITATION XII	28
MEDITATION XIII	39
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	45

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MEANS OF DEFENCE, INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

*"To be or not to be,
That is the question."*

—Shakspeare, Hamlet.

MEDITATION X

A TREATISE ON MARITAL POLICY

When a man reaches the position in which the first part of this book sets him, we suppose that the idea of his wife being possessed by another makes his heart beat, and rekindles his passion, either by an appeal to his *amour propre*, his egotism, or his self-interest, for unless he is still on his wife's side, he must be one of the lowest of men and deserves his fate.

In this trying moment it is very difficult for a husband to avoid making mistakes; for, with regard to most men, the art of ruling a wife is even less known than that of judiciously choosing one. However, marital policy consists chiefly in the practical application of three principles which should be the soul of your conduct. The first is never to believe what a woman says; the second, always to look for the spirit without dwelling too much upon the letter of her actions; and the third, not to forget that a woman is never so garrulous as when she holds her tongue, and is never working with more energy than when she keeps quiet.

From the moment that your suspicions are aroused, you ought to be like a man mounted on a tricky horse, who always watches the ears of the beast, in fear of being thrown from the saddle.

But art consists not so much in the knowledge of principles, as in the manner of applying them; to reveal them to ignorant people is to put a razor in the hand of a monkey. Moreover, the first and most vital of your duties consists in perpetual dissimulation, an accomplishment in which most husbands are sadly lacking. In detecting the symptoms of minotaurism a little too plainly marked in the conduct of their wives, most men at once indulge in the most insulting suspicions. Their minds contract a tinge of bitterness which manifests itself in their conversation, and in their manners; and the alarm which fills their heart, like the gas flame in a glass globe, lights up their countenances so plainly, that it accounts for their conduct.

Now a woman, who has twelve hours more than you have each day to reflect and to study you, reads the suspicion written upon your face at the very moment that it arises. She will never forget this gratuitous insult. Nothing can ever remedy that. All is now said and done, and the very next day, if she has opportunity, she will join the ranks of inconsistent women.

You ought then to begin under these circumstances to affect towards your wife the same boundless confidence that you have hitherto had in her. If you begin to lull her anxieties by honeyed words, you are lost, she will not believe you; for she has her policy as you have yours. Now there is as much need for tact as for kindness in your behavior, in order to inculcate in her, without her knowing it, a feeling of security, which will lead her to lay back her ears, and prevent you from using rein or spur at the

wrong moment.

But how can we compare a horse, the frankest of all animals, to a being, the flashes of whose thought, and the movements of whose impulses render her at moments more prudent than the Servite Fra-Paolo, the most terrible adviser that the Ten at Venice ever had; more deceitful than a king; more adroit than Louis XI; more profound than Machiavelli; as sophisticated as Hobbes; as acute as Voltaire; as pliant as the fiancee of Mamolin; and distrustful of no one in the whole wide world but you?

Moreover, to this dissimulation, by means of which the springs that move your conduct ought to be made as invisible as those that move the world, must be added absolute self-control. That diplomatic imperturbability, so boasted of by Talleyrand, must be the least of your qualities; his exquisite politeness and the grace of his manners must distinguish your conversation. The professor here expressly forbids you to use your whip, if you would obtain complete control over your gentle Andalusian steed.

LXI.

If a man strike his mistress it is a self-inflicted wound;
but if he strike his wife it is suicide!

How can we think of a government without police, an action without force, a power without weapons? – Now this is exactly the problem which we shall try to solve in our future meditations. But first we must submit two preliminary observations. They will furnish us with two other theories concerning the application of

all the mechanical means which we propose you should employ. An instance from life will refresh these arid and dry dissertations: the hearing of such a story will be like laying down a book, to work in the field.

In the year 1822, on a fine morning in the month of February, I was traversing the boulevards of Paris, from the quiet circles of the Marais to the fashionable quarters of the Chaussee-d'Antin, and I observed for the first time, not without a certain philosophic joy, the diversity of physiognomy and the varieties of costume which, from the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule even to the Madeleine, made each portion of the boulevard a world of itself, and this whole zone of Paris, a grand panorama of manners. Having at that time no idea of what the world was, and little thinking that one day I should have the audacity to set myself up as a legislator on marriage, I was going to take lunch at the house of a college friend, who was perhaps too early in life afflicted with a wife and two children. My former professor of mathematics lived at a short distance from the house of my college friend, and I promised myself the pleasure of a visit to this worthy mathematician before indulging my appetite for the dainties of friendship. I accordingly made my way to the heart of a study, where everything was covered with a dust which bore witness to the lofty abstraction of the scholar. But a surprise was in store for me there. I perceived a pretty woman seated on the arm of an easy chair, as if mounted on an English horse; her face took on the look of conventional surprise worn by mistresses

of the house towards those they do not know, but she did not disguise the expression of annoyance which, at my appearance, clouded her countenance with the thought that I was aware how ill-timed was my presence. My master, doubtless absorbed in an equation, had not yet raised his head; I therefore waved my right hand towards the young lady, like a fish moving his fin, and on tiptoe I retired with a mysterious smile which might be translated "I will not be the one to prevent him committing an act of infidelity to Urania." She nodded her head with one of those sudden gestures whose graceful vivacity is not to be translated into words.

"My good friend, don't go away," cried the geometrician. "This is my wife!"

I bowed for the second time! – Oh, Coulon! Why wert thou not present to applaud the only one of thy pupils who understood from that moment the expression, "anacreontic," as applied to a bow? – The effect must have been very overwhelming; for Madame the Professress, as the Germans say, rose hurriedly as if to go, making me a slight bow which seemed to say: "Adorable! – " Her husband stopped her, saying:

"Don't go, my child, this is one of my pupils."

The young woman bent her head towards the scholar as a bird perched on a bough stretches its neck to pick up a seed.

"It is not possible," said the husband, heaving a sigh, "and I am going to prove it to you by $A + B$."

"Let us drop that, sir, I beg you," she answered, pointing with

a wink to me.

If it had been a problem in algebra, my master would have understood this look, but it was Chinese to him, and so he went on.

"Look here, child, I constitute you judge in the matter; our income is ten thousand francs."

At these words I retired to the door, as if I were seized with a wild desire to examine the framed drawings which had attracted my attention. My discretion was rewarded by an eloquent glance. Alas! she did not know that in Fortunio I could have played the part of Sharp-Ears, who heard the truffles growing.

"In accordance with the principles of general economy," said my master, "no one ought to spend in rent and servant's wages more than two-tenths of his income; now our apartment and our attendance cost altogether a hundred louis. I give you twelve hundred francs to dress with" [in saying this he emphasized every syllable]. "Your food," he went on, takes up four thousand francs, our children demand at least twenty-five louis; I take for myself only eight hundred francs; washing, fuel and light mount up to about a thousand francs; so that there does not remain, as you see, more than six hundred francs for unforeseen expenses. In order to buy the cross of diamonds, we must draw a thousand crowns from our capital, and if once we take that course, my little darling, there is no reason why we should not leave Paris which you love so much, and at once take up our residence in the country, in order to retrench. Children and household expenses

will increase fast enough! Come, try to be reasonable!"

"I suppose I must," she said, "but you will be the only husband in Paris who has not given a New Year's gift to his wife."

And she stole away like a school-boy who goes to finish an imposed duty. My master made a gesture of relief. When he saw the door close he rubbed his hands, he talked of the war in Spain; and I went my way to the Rue de Provence, little knowing that I had received the first installment of a great lesson in marriage, any more than I dreamt of the conquest of Constantinople by General Diebitsch. I arrived at my host's house at the very moment they were sitting down to luncheon, after having waited for me the half hour demanded by usage. It was, I believe, as she opened a *pate de foie gras* that my pretty hostess said to her husband, with a determined air:

"Alexander, if you were really nice you would give me that pair of ear-rings that we saw at Fossin's."

"You shall have them," cheerfully replied my friend, drawing from his pocketbook three notes of a thousand francs, the sight of which made his wife's eyes sparkle. "I can no more resist the pleasure of offering them to you," he added, "than you can that of accepting them. This is the anniversary of the day I first saw you, and the diamonds will perhaps make you remember it! –"

"You bad man!" said she, with a winning smile.

She poked two fingers into her bodice, and pulling out a bouquet of violets she threw them with childlike contempt into the face of my friend. Alexander gave her the price of the jewels,

crying out:

"I had seen the flowers!"

I shall never forget the lively gesture and the eager joy with which, like a cat which lays its spotted paw upon a mouse, the little woman seized the three bank notes; she rolled them up blushing with pleasure, and put them in the place of the violets which before had perfumed her bosom. I could not help thinking about my old mathematical master. I did not then see any difference between him and his pupil, than that which exists between a frugal man and a prodigal, little thinking that he of the two who seemed to calculate the better, actually calculated the worse. The luncheon went off merrily. Very soon, seated in a little drawing-room newly decorated, before a cheerful fire which gave warmth and made our hearts expand as in spring time, I felt compelled to make this loving couple a guest's compliments on the furnishing of their little bower.

"It is a pity that all this costs so dear," said my friend, "but it is right that the nest be worthy of the bird; but why the devil do you compliment me upon curtains which are not paid for? – You make me remember, just at the time I am digesting lunch, that I still owe two thousand francs to a Turk of an upholsterer."

At these words the mistress of the house made a mental inventory of the pretty room with her eyes, and the radiancy of her face changed to thoughtfulness. Alexander took me by the hand and led me to the recess of a bay window.

"Do you happen," he said in a low voice, "to have a thousand

crowns to lend me? I have only twelve thousand francs income, and this year – "

"Alexander," cried the dear creature, interrupting her husband, while, rushing up, she offered him the three banknotes, "I see now that it is a piece of folly – "

"What do you mean?" answered he, "keep your money."

"But, my love, I am ruining you! I ought to know that you love me so much, that I ought not to tell you all that I wish for."

"Keep it, my darling, it is your lawful property – nonsense, I shall gamble this winter and get all that back again!"

"Gamble!" cried she, with an expression of horror. "Alexander, take back these notes! Come, sir, I wish you to do so."

"No, no," replied my friend, repulsing the white and delicious little hand. "Are you not going on Thursday to a ball of Madame de B – ?"

"I will think about what you asked of me," said I to my comrade.

I went away bowing to his wife, but I saw plainly after that scene that my anacreontic salutation did not produce much effect upon her.

"He must be mad," thought I as I went away, "to talk of a thousand crowns to a law student."

Five days later I found myself at the house of Madame de B – , whose balls were becoming fashionable. In the midst of the quadrilles I saw the wife of my friend and that of

the mathematician. Madame Alexander wore a charming dress; some flowers and white muslin were all that composed it. She wore a little cross *a la Jeannette*, hanging by a black velvet ribbon which set off the whiteness of her scented skin; long pears of gold decorated her ears. On the neck of Madame the Professress sparkled a superb cross of diamonds.

"How funny that is," said I to a personage who had not yet studied the world's ledger, nor deciphered the heart of a single woman.

That personage was myself. If I had then the desire to dance with those fair women, it was simply because I knew a secret which emboldened my timidity.

"So after all, madame, you have your cross?" I said to her first.

"Well, I fairly won it!" she replied, with a smile hard to describe.

"How is this! no ear-rings?" I remarked to the wife of my friend.

"Ah!" she replied, "I have enjoyed possession of them during a whole luncheon time, but you see that I have ended by converting Alexander."

"He allowed himself to be easily convinced?"

She answered with a look of triumph.

Eight years afterwards, this scene suddenly rose to my memory, though I had long since forgotten it, and in the light of the candles I distinctly discerned the moral of it. Yes, a woman has a horror of being convinced of anything; when you try to

persuade her she immediately submits to being led astray and continues to play the role which nature gave her. In her view, to allow herself to be won over is to grant a favor, but exact arguments irritate and confound her; in order to guide her you must employ the power which she herself so frequently employs and which lies in an appeal to sensibility. It is therefore in his wife, and not in himself, that a husband can find the instruments of his despotism; as diamond cuts diamond so must the woman be made to tyrannize over herself. To know how to offer the earrings in such a way that they will be returned, is a secret whose application embraces the slightest details of life. And now let us pass to the second observation.

"He who can manage property of one toman, can manage one of an hundred thousand," says an Indian proverb; and I, for my part, will enlarge upon this Asiatic adage and declare, that he who can govern one woman can govern a nation, and indeed there is very much similarity between these two governments. Must not the policy of husbands be very nearly the same as the policy of kings? Do not we see kings trying to amuse the people in order to deprive them of their liberty; throwing food at their heads for one day, in order to make them forget the misery of a whole year; preaching to them not to steal and at the same time stripping them of everything; and saying to them: "It seems to me that if I were the people I should be virtuous"? It is from England that we obtain the precedent which husbands should adopt in their houses. Those who have eyes ought to see that

when the government is running smoothly the Whigs are rarely in power. A long Tory ministry has always succeeded an ephemeral Liberal cabinet. The orators of a national party resemble the rats which wear their teeth away in gnawing the rotten panel; they close up the hole as soon as they smell the nuts and the lard locked up in the royal cupboard. The woman is the Whig of our government. Occupying the situation in which we have left her she might naturally aspire to the conquest of more than one privilege. Shut your eyes to the intrigues, allow her to waste her strength in mounting half the steps of your throne; and when she is on the point of touching your sceptre, fling her back to the ground, quite gently and with infinite grace, saying to her: "Bravo!" and leaving her to expect success in the hereafter. The craftiness of this manoeuvre will prove a fine support to you in the employment of any means which it may please you to choose from your arsenal, for the object of subduing your wife.

Such are the general principles which a husband should put into practice, if he wishes to escape mistakes in ruling his little kingdom. Nevertheless, in spite of what was decided by the minority at the council of Macon (Montesquieu, who had perhaps foreseen the coming of constitutional government has remarked, I forget in what part of his writings, that good sense in public assemblies is always found on the side of the minority), we discern in a woman a soul and a body, and we commence by investigating the means to gain control of her moral nature. The exercise of thought, whatever people may say, is more noble than

the exercise of bodily organs, and we give precedence to science over cookery and to intellectual training over hygiene.

MEDITATION XI

INSTRUCTION IN THE HOME

Whether wives should or should not be put under instruction – such is the question before us. Of all those which we have discussed this is the only one which has two extremes and admits of no compromise. Knowledge and ignorance, such are the two irreconcilable terms of this problem. Between these two abysses we seem to see Louis XVIII reckoning up the felicities of the eighteenth century, and the unhappiness of the nineteenth. Seated in the centre of the seesaw, which he knew so well how to balance by his own weight, he contemplates at one end of it the fanatic ignorance of a lay brother, the apathy of a serf, the shining armor on the horses of a banneret; he thinks he hears the cry, "France and Montjoie-Saint-Denis!" But he turns round, he smiles as he sees the haughty look of a manufacturer, who is captain in the national guard; the elegant carriage of a stock broker; the simple costume of a peer of France turned journalist and sending his son to the Polytechnique; then he notices the costly stuffs, the newspapers, the steam engines; and he drinks his coffee from a cup of Sevres, at the bottom of which still glitters the "N" surmounted by a crown.

"Away with civilization! Away with thought!" – That is your cry. You ought to hold in horror the education of women for the reason so well realized in Spain, that it is easier to govern a nation of idiots than a nation of scholars. A nation degraded is happy: if she has not the sentiment of liberty, neither has she the storms and disturbances which it begets; she lives as polyps live; she can be cut up into two or three pieces and each piece is still a nation, complete and living, and ready to be governed by the first blind man who arms himself with the pastoral staff.

What is it that produces this wonderful characteristic of humanity? Ignorance; ignorance is the sole support of despotism, which lives on darkness and silence. Now happiness in the domestic establishment as in a political state is a negative happiness. The affection of a people for a king, in an absolute monarchy, is perhaps less contrary to nature than the fidelity of a wife towards her husband, when love between them no longer exists. Now we know that, in your house, love at this moment has one foot on the window-sill. It is necessary for you, therefore, to put into practice that salutary rigor by which M. de Metternich prolongs his *statu quo*; but we would advise you to do so with more tact and with still more tenderness; for your wife is more crafty than all the Germans put together, and as voluptuous as the Italians.

You should, therefore, try to put off as long as possible the fatal moment when your wife asks you for a book. This will be easy. You will first of all pronounce in a tone of disdain

the phrase "Blue stocking;" and, on her request being repeated, you will tell her what ridicule attaches, among the neighbors, to pedantic women.

You will then repeat to her, very frequently, that the most lovable and the wittiest women in the world are found at Paris, where women never read;

That women are like people of quality who, according to Mascarillo, know everything without having learned anything; that a woman while she is dancing, or while she is playing cards, without even having the appearance of listening, ought to know how to pick up from the conversation of talented men the ready-made phrases out of which fools manufacture their wit at Paris;

That in this country decisive judgments on men and affairs are passed round from hand to hand; and that the little cutting phrase with which a woman criticises an author, demolishes a work, or heaps contempt on a picture, has more power in the world than a court decision;

That women are beautiful mirrors, which naturally reflect the most brilliant ideas;

That natural wit is everything, and the best education is gained rather from what we learn in the world than by what we read in books;

That, above all, reading ends in making the eyes dull, etc.

To think of leaving a woman at liberty to read the books which her character of mind may prompt her to choose! This is to drop a spark in a powder magazine; it is worse than that, it

is to teach your wife to separate herself from you; to live in an imaginary world, in a Paradise. For what do women read? Works of passion, the *Confessions* of Rousseau, romances, and all those compositions which work most powerfully on their sensibility. They like neither argument nor the ripe fruits of knowledge. Now have you ever considered the results which follow these poetical readings?

Romances, and indeed all works of imagination, paint sentiments and events with colors of a very different brilliancy from those presented by nature. The fascination of such works springs less from the desire which each author feels to show his skill in putting forth choice and delicate ideas than from the mysterious working of the human intellect. It is characteristic of man to purify and refine everything that he lays up in the treasury of his thoughts. What human faces, what monuments of the dead are not made more beautiful than actual nature in the artistic representation? The soul of the reader assists in this conspiracy against the truth, either by means of the profound silence which it enjoys in reading or by the fire of mental conception with which it is agitated or by the clearness with which imagery is reflected in the mirror of the understanding. Who has not seen on reading the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques, that Madame de Warens is described as much prettier than she ever was in actual life? It might almost be said that our souls dwell with delight upon the figures which they had met in a former existence, under fairer skies; that they accept the creations of another soul only

as wings on which they may soar into space; features the most delicate they bring to perfection by making them their own; and the most poetic expression which appears in the imagery of an author brings forth still more ethereal imagery in the mind of a reader. To read is to join with the writer in a creative act. The mystery of the transubstantiation of ideas, originates perhaps in the instinctive consciousness that we have of a vocation loftier than our present destiny. Or, is it based on the lost tradition of a former life? What must that life have been, if this slight residuum of memory offers us such volumes of delight?

Moreover, in reading plays and romances, woman, a creature much more susceptible than we are to excitement, experiences the most violent transport. She creates for herself an ideal existence beside which all reality grows pale; she at once attempts to realize this voluptuous life, to take to herself the magic which she sees in it. And, without knowing it, she passes from spirit to letter and from soul to sense.

And would you be simple enough to believe that the manners, the sentiments of a man like you, who usually dress and undress before your wife, can counterbalance the influence of these books and outshine the glory of their fictitious lovers, in whose garments the fair reader sees neither hole nor stain? – Poor fool! too late, alas! for her happiness and for yours, your wife will find out that the *heroes* of poetry are as rare in real life as the *Apollos* of sculpture!

Very many husbands will find themselves embarrassed in

trying to prevent their wives from reading, yet there are certain people who allege that reading has this advantage, that men know what their wives are about when they have a book in hand. In the first place you will see, in the next Meditation, what a tendency the sedentary life has to make a woman quarrelsome; but have you never met those beings without poetry, who succeed in petrifying their unhappy companions by reducing life to its most mechanical elements? Study great men in their conversation and learn by heart the admirable arguments by which they condemn poetry and the pleasures of imagination.

But if, after all your efforts, your wife persists in wishing to read, put at her disposal at once all possible books from the A B C of her little boy to *Rene*, a book more dangerous to you when in her hands than *Therese Philosophe*. You might create in her an utter disgust for reading by giving her tedious books; and plunge her into utter idiocy with *Marie Alacoque*, *The Brosse de Penitence*, or with the chansons which were so fashionable in the time of Louis XV; but later on you will find, in the present volume, the means of so thoroughly employing your wife's time, that any kind of reading will be quite out of the question.

And first of all, consider the immense resources which the education of women has prepared for you in your efforts to turn your wife from her fleeting taste for science. Just see with what admirable stupidity girls lend themselves to reap the benefit of the education which is imposed upon them in France; we give them in charge to nursery maids, to companions, to governesses

who teach them twenty tricks of coquetry and false modesty, for every single noble and true idea which they impart to them. Girls are brought up as slaves, and are accustomed to the idea that they are sent into the world to imitate their grandmothers, to breed canary birds, to make herbals, to water little Bengal rose-bushes, to fill in worsted work, or to put on collars. Moreover, if a little girl in her tenth year has more refinement than a boy of twenty, she is timid and awkward. She is frightened at a spider, chatters nonsense, thinks of dress, talks about the fashions and has not the courage to be either a watchful mother or a chaste wife.

Notice what progress she had made; she has been shown how to paint roses, and to embroider ties in such a way as to earn eight sous a day. She has learned the history of France in *Ragois* and chronology in the *Tables du Citoyen Chantreau*, and her young imagination has been set free in the realm of geography; all without any aim, excepting that of keeping away all that might be dangerous to her heart; but at the same time her mother and her teachers repeat with unwearied voice the lesson, that the whole science of a woman lies in knowing how to arrange the fig leaf which our Mother Eve wore. "She does not hear for fifteen years," says Diderot, "anything else but 'my daughter, your fig leaf is on badly; my daughter, your fig leaf is on well; my daughter, would it not look better so?'"

Keep your wife then within this fine and noble circle of knowledge. If by chance your wife wishes to have a library, buy for her Florian, Malte-Brun, *The Cabinet des Fees*, *The Arabian*

Nights, Redoute's Roses, The Customs of China, The Pigeons, by Madame Knip, the great work on Egypt, etc. Carry out, in short, the clever suggestion of that princess who, when she was told of a riot occasioned by the dearness of bread, said, "Why don't they eat cake?"

Perhaps, one evening, your wife will reproach you for being sullen and not speaking to her; perhaps she will say that you are ridiculous, when you have just made a pun; but this is one of the slight annoyances incident to our system; and, moreover, what does it matter to you that the education of women in France is the most pleasant of absurdities, and that your marital obscurantism has brought a doll to your arms? As you have not sufficient courage to undertake a fairer task, would it not be better to lead your wife along the beaten track of married life in safety, than to run the risk of making her scale the steep precipices of love? She is likely to be a mother: you must not exactly expect to have Gracchi for sons, but to be really *pater quem nuptiae demonstrant*; now, in order to aid you in reaching this consummation, we must make this book an arsenal from which each one, in accordance with his wife's character and his own, may choose weapons fit to employ against the terrible genius of evil, which is always ready to rise up in the soul of a wife; and since it may fairly be considered that the ignorant are the most cruel opponents of feminine education, this Meditation will serve as a breviary for the majority of husbands.

If a woman has received a man's education, she possesses in

very truth the most brilliant and most fertile sources of happiness both to herself and to her husband; but this kind of woman is as rare as happiness itself; and if you do not possess her for your wife, your best course is to confine the one you do possess, for the sake of your common felicity, to the region of ideas she was born in, for you must not forget that one moment of pride in her might destroy you, by setting on the throne a slave who would immediately be tempted to abuse her power.

After all, by following the system prescribed in this Meditation, a man of superiority will be relieved from the necessity of putting his thoughts into small change, when he wishes to be understood by his wife, if indeed this man of superiority has been guilty of the folly of marrying one of those poor creatures who cannot understand him, instead of choosing for his wife a young girl whose mind and heart he has tested and studied for a considerable time.

Our aim in this last matrimonial observation has not been to advise all men of superiority to seek for women of superiority and we do not wish each one to expound our principles after the manner of Madame de Stael, who attempted in the most indelicate manner to effect a union between herself and Napoleon. These two beings would have been very unhappy in their domestic life; and Josephine was a wife accomplished in a very different sense from this virago of the nineteenth century.

And, indeed, when we praise those undiscoverable girls so happily educated by chance, so well endowed by nature, whose

delicate souls endure so well the rude contact of the great soul of him we call *a man*, we mean to speak of those rare and noble creatures of whom Goethe has given us a model in his Claire of *Egmont*; we are thinking of those women who seek no other glory than that of playing their part well; who adapt themselves with amazing pliancy to the will and pleasure of those whom nature has given them for masters; soaring at one time into the boundless sphere of their thought and in turn stooping to the simple task of amusing them as if they were children; understanding well the inconsistencies of masculine and violent souls, understanding also their slightest word, their most puzzling looks; happy in silence, happy also in the midst of loquacity; and well aware that the pleasures, the ideas and the moral instincts of a Lord Byron cannot be those of a bonnet-maker. But we must stop; this fair picture has led us too far from our subject; we are treating of marriage and not of love.

MEDITATION XII

THE HYGIENE OF MARRIAGE

The aim of this Meditation is to call to your attention a new method of defence, by which you may reduce the will of your new wife to a condition of utter and abject submission. This is brought about by the reaction upon her moral nature of physical changes, and the wise lowering of her physical condition by a diet skillfully controlled.

This great and philosophical question of conjugal medicine will doubtless be regarded favorably by all who are gouty, are impotent, or suffer from catarrh; and by that legion of old men whose dullness we have quickened by our article on the predestined. But it principally concerns those husbands who have courage enough to enter into those paths of machiavelism, such as would not have been unworthy of that great king of France who endeavored to secure the happiness of the nation at the expense of certain noble heads. Here, the subject is the same. The amputation or the weakening of certain members is always to the advantage of the whole body.

Do you think seriously that a celibate who has been subject to a diet consisting of the herb hanea, of cucumbers, of purslane

and the applications of leeches to his ears, as recommended by Sterne, would be able to carry by storm the honor of your wife? Suppose that a diplomat had been clever enough to affix a permanent linen plaster to the head of Napoleon, or to purge him every morning: Do you think that Napoleon, Napoleon the Great, would ever have conquered Italy? Was Napoleon, during his campaign in Russia, a prey to the most horrible pangs of dysuria, or was he not? That is one of the questions which has weighed upon the minds of the whole world. Is it not certain that cooling applications, douches, baths, etc., produce great changes in more or less acute affections of the brain? In the middle of the heat of July when each one of your pores slowly filters out and returns to the devouring atmosphere the glasses of iced lemonade which you have drunk at a single draught, have you ever felt the flame of courage, the vigor of thought, the complete energy which rendered existence light and sweet to you some months before?

No, no; the iron most closely cemented into the hardest stone will raise and throw apart the most durable monument, by reason of the secret influence exercised by the slow and invisible variations of heat and cold, which vex the atmosphere. In the first place, let us be sure that if atmospheric mediums have an influence over man, there is still a stronger reason for believing that man, in turn, influences the imagination of his kind, by the more or less vigor with which he projects his will and thus produces a veritable atmosphere around him.

It is in this fact that the power of the actor's talent lies, as well as that of poetry and of fanaticism; for the former is the eloquence of words, as the latter is the eloquence of actions; and in this lies the foundation of a science, so far in its infancy.

This will, so potent in one man against another, this nervous and fluid force, eminently mobile and transmittable, is itself subject to the changing condition of our organization, and there are many circumstances which make this frail organism of ours to vary. At this point, our metaphysical observation shall stop and we will enter into an analysis of the circumstances which develop the will of man and impart to it a grater degree of strength or weakness.

Do not believe, however, that it is our aim to induce you to put cataplasms on the honor of your wife, to lock her up in a sweating house, or to seal her up like a letter; no. We will not even attempt to teach you the magnetic theory which would give you the power to make your will triumph in the soul of your wife; there is not a single husband who would accept the happiness of an eternal love at the price of this perpetual strain laid upon his animal forces. But we shall attempt to expound a powerful system of hygiene, which will enable you to put out the flame when your chimney takes fire. The elegant women of Paris and the provinces (and these elegant women form a very distinguished class among the honest women) have plenty of means of attaining the object which we propose, without rummaging in the arsenal of medicine for the four cold specifics, the water-lily and the

thousand inventions worthy only of witches. We will leave to Aelian his herb hanea and to Sterne the purslane and cucumber which indicate too plainly his antiphlogistic purpose.

You should let your wife recline all day long on soft armchairs, in which she sinks into a veritable bath of eiderdown or feathers; you should encourage in every way that does no violence to your conscience, the inclination which women have to breathe no other air but the scented atmosphere of a chamber seldom opened, where daylight can scarcely enter through the soft, transparent curtains.

You will obtain marvelous results from this system, after having previously experienced the shock of her excitement; but if you are strong enough to support this momentary transport of your wife you will soon see her artificial energy die away. In general, women love to live fast, but, after their tempest of passion, return to that condition of tranquillity which insures the happiness of a husband.

Jean-Jacques, through the instrumentality of his enchanting Julie, must have proved to your wife that it was infinitely becoming to refrain from affronting her delicate stomach and her refined palate by making chyle out of coarse lumps of beef, and enormous collops of mutton. Is there anything purer in the world than those interesting vegetables, always fresh and scentless, those tinted fruits, that coffee, that fragrant chocolate, those oranges, the golden apples of Atalanta, the dates of Arabia and the biscuits of Brussels, a wholesome and elegant food which

produces satisfactory results, at the same time that it imparts to a woman an air of mysterious originality? By the regimen which she chooses she becomes quite celebrated in her immediate circle, just as she would be by a singular toilet, a benevolent action or a *bon mot*. Pythagoras must needs have cast his spell over her, and become as much petted by her as a poodle or an ape.

Never commit the imprudence of certain men who, for the sake of putting on the appearance of wit, controvert the feminine dictum, *that the figure is preserved by meagre diet*. Women on such a diet never grow fat, that is clear and positive; do you stick to that.

Praise the skill with which some women, renowned for their beauty, have been able to preserve it by bathing themselves in milk, several times a day, or in water compounded of substances likely to render the skin softer and to lower the nervous tension.

Advise her above all things to refrain from washing herself in cold water; because water warm or tepid is the proper thing for all kinds of ablutions.

Let Broussais be your idol. At the least indisposition of your wife, and on the slightest pretext, order the application of leeches; do not even shrink from applying from time to time a few dozen on yourself, in order to establish the system of that celebrated doctor in your household. You will constantly be called upon from your position as husband to discover that your wife is too ruddy; try even sometimes to bring the blood to her head, in order

to have the right to introduce into the house at certain intervals a squad of leeches.

Your wife ought to drink water, lightly tinged with a Burgundy wine agreeable to her taste, but destitute of any tonic properties; every other kind of wine would be bad for her. Never allow her to drink water alone; if you do, you are lost.

"Impetuous fluid! As soon as you press against the floodgates of the brain, how quickly do they yield to your power! Then Curiosity comes swimming by, making signs to her companions to follow; they plunge into the current. Imagination sits dreaming on the bank. She follows the torrent with her eyes and transforms the fragments of straw and reed into masts and bowsprit. And scarcely has the transformation taken place, before Desire, holding in one hand her skirt drawn up even to her knees, appears, sees the vessel and takes possession of it. O ye drinkers of water, it is by means of that magic spring that you have so often turned and turned again the world at your will, throwing beneath your feet the weak, trampling on his neck, and sometimes changing even the form and aspect of nature!"

If by this system of inaction, in combination with our system of diet, you fail to obtain satisfactory results, throw yourself with might and main into another system, which we will explain to you.

Man has a certain degree of energy given to him. Such and such a man or woman stands to another as ten is to thirty, as one to five; and there is a certain degree of energy which no one of us

ever exceeds. The quantity of energy, or willpower, which each of us possesses diffuses itself like sound; it is sometimes weak, sometimes strong; it modifies itself according to the octaves to which it mounts. This force is unique, and although it may be dissipated in desire, in passion, in toils of intellect or in bodily exertion, it turns towards the object to which man directs it. A boxer expends it in blows of the fist, the baker in kneading his bread, the poet in the enthusiasm which consumes and demands an enormous quantity of it; it passes to the feet of the dancer; in fact, every one diffuses it at will, and may I see the Minotaur tranquilly seated this very evening upon my bed, if you do not know as well as I do how he expends it. Almost all men spend in necessary toils, or in the anguish of direful passions, this fine sum of energy and of will, with which nature has endowed them; but our honest women are all the prey to the caprices and the struggles of this power which knows not what to do with itself. If, in the case of your wife, this energy has not been subdued by the prescribed dietary regimen, subject her to some form of activity which will constantly increase in violence. Find some means by which her sum of force which inconveniences you may be carried off, by some occupation which shall entirely absorb her strength. Without setting your wife to work the crank of a machine, there are a thousand ways of tiring her out under the load of constant work.

In leaving it to you to find means for carrying out our design – and these means vary with circumstances – we would point

out that dancing is one of the very best abysses in which love may bury itself. This point having been very well treated by a contemporary, we will give him here an opportunity of speaking his mind:

"The poor victim who is the admiration of an enchanted audience pays dear for her success. What result can possibly follow on exertions so ill-proportioned to the resources of the delicate sex? The muscles of the body, disproportionately wearied, are forced to their full power of exertion. The nervous forces, intended to feed the fire of passions, and the labor of the brain, are diverted from their course. The failure of desire, the wish for rest, the exclusive craving for substantial food, all point to a nature impoverished, more anxious to recruit than to enjoy. Moreover, a denizen of the side scenes said to me one day, 'Whoever has lived with dancers has lived with sheep; for in their exhaustion they can think of nothing but strong food.' Believe me, then, the love which a ballet girl inspires is very delusive; in her we find, under an appearance of an artificial springtime, a soil which is cold as well as greedy, and senses which are utterly dulled. The Calabrian doctors prescribed the dance as a remedy for the hysteric affections which are common among the women of their country; and the Arabs use a somewhat similar recipe for the highbred mares, whose too lively temperament hinders their fecundity. 'Dull as a dancer' is a familiar proverb at the theatre. In fact, the best brains of Europe are convinced that dancing brings with it a result eminently cooling.

"In support of this it may be necessary to add other observations. The life of shepherds gives birth to irregular loves. The morals of weavers were horribly decried in Greece. The Italians have given birth to a proverb concerning the lubricity of lame women. The Spanish, in whose veins are found many mixtures of African incontinence, have expressed their sentiments in a maxim which is familiar with them: *Muger y gallina pierna quebrantada* [it is good that a woman and a hen have one broken leg]. The profound sagacity of the Orientals in the art of pleasure is altogether expressed by this ordinance of the caliph Hakim, founder of the Druses, who forbade, under pain of death, the making in his kingdom of any shoes for women. It seems that over the whole globe the tempests of the heart wait only to break out after the limbs are at rest!"

What an admirable manoeuvre it would be to make a wife dance, and to feed her on vegetables!

Do not believe that these observations, which are as true as they are wittily stated, contradict in any way the system which we have previously prescribed; by the latter, as by the former, we succeed in producing in a woman that needed listlessness, which is the pledge of repose and tranquility. By the latter you leave a door open, that the enemy may flee; by the former, you slay him.

Now at this point it seems to us that we hear timorous people and those of narrow views rising up against our idea of hygiene in the name of morality and sentiment.

"Is not woman endowed with a soul? Has she not feelings as

we have? What right has any one, without regard to her pain, her ideas, or her requirements, to hammer her out, as a cheap metal, out of which a workman fashions a candlestick or an extinguisher? Is it because the poor creatures are already so feeble and miserable that a brute claims the power to torture them, merely at the dictate of his own fancies, which may be more or less just? And, if by this weakening or heating system of yours, which draws out, softens, hardens the fibres, you cause frightful and cruel sickness, if you bring to the tomb a woman who is dear to you; if, if, – "

This is our answer:

Have you never noticed into how many different shapes harlequin and columbine change their little white hats? They turn and twist them so well that they become, one after another, a spinning-top, a boat, a wine-glass, a half-moon, a cap, a basket, a fish, a whip, a dagger, a baby, and a man's head.

This is an exact image of the despotism with which you ought to shape and reshape your wife.

The wife is a piece of property, acquired by contract; she is part of your furniture, for possession is nine-tenths of the law; in fact, the woman is not, to speak correctly, anything but an adjunct to the man; therefore abridge, cut, file this article as you choose; she is in every sense yours. Take no notice at all of her murmurs, of her cries, of her sufferings; nature has ordained her for your use, that she may bear everything – children, griefs, blows and pains from man.

Don't accuse yourself of harshness. In the codes of all the nations which are called civilized, man has written the laws which govern the destiny of women in these cruel terms: *Vae victis!* Woe to the conquered!

Finally, think upon this last observation, the most weighty, perhaps, of all that we have made up to this time: if you, her husband, do not break under the scourge of your will this weak and charming reed, there will be a celibate, capricious and despotic, ready to bring her under a yoke more cruel still; and she will have to endure two tyrannies instead of one. Under all considerations, therefore, humanity demands that you should follow the system of our hygiene.

MEDITATION XIII

OF PERSONAL MEASURES

Perhaps the preceding Meditations will prove more likely to develop general principles of conduct, than to repel force by force. They furnish, however, the pharmacopoeia of medicine and not the practice of medicine. Now consider the personal means which nature has put into your hands for self-defence; for Providence has forgotten no one; if to the sepia (that fish of the Adriatic) has been given the black dye by which he produces a cloud in which he disappears from his enemy, you should believe that a husband has not been left without a weapon; and now the time has come for you to draw yours.

You ought to have stipulated before you married that your wife should nurse her own children; in this case, as long as she is occupied in bearing children or in nursing them you will avoid the danger from one or two quarters. The wife who is engaged in bringing into the world and nursing a baby has not really the time to bother with a lover, not to speak of the fact that before and after her confinement she cannot show herself in the world. In short, how can the most bold of the distinguished women who are the subject of this work show herself under these circumstances

in public? O Lord Byron, thou didst not wish to see women even eat!

Six months after her confinement, and when the child is on the eve of being weaned, a woman just begins to feel that she can enjoy her restoration and her liberty.

If your wife has not nursed her first child, you have too much sense not to notice this circumstance, and not to make her desire to nurse her next one. You will read to her the *Emile* of Jean-Jacques; you will fill her imagination with a sense of motherly duties; you will excite her moral feelings, etc.: in a word, you are either a fool or a man of sense; and in the first case, even after reading this book, you will always be minotaurized; while in the second, you will understand how to take a hint.

This first expedient is in reality your own personal business. It will give you a great advantage in carrying out all the other methods.

Since Alcibiades cut the ears and the tail of his dog, in order to do a service to Pericles, who had on his hands a sort of Spanish war, as well as an Ouvrard contract affair, such as was then attracting the notice of the Athenians, there is not a single minister who has not endeavored to cut the ears of some dog or other.

So in medicine, when inflammation takes place at some vital point of the system, counter-irritation is brought about at some other point, by means of blisters, scarifications and cupping.

Another method consists in blistering your wife, or giving her,

with a mental needle, a prod whose violence is such as to make a diversion in your favor.

A man of considerable mental resources had made his honeymoon last for about four years; the moon began to wane, and he saw appearing the fatal hollow in its circle. His wife was exactly in that state of mind which we attributed at the close of our first part to every honest woman; she had taken a fancy to a worthless fellow who was both insignificant in appearance and ugly; the only thing in his favor was, he was not her own husband. At this juncture, her husband meditated the cutting of some dog's tail, in order to renew, if possible, his lease of happiness. His wife had conducted herself with such tact, that it would have been very embarrassing to forbid her lover the house, for she had discovered some slight tie of relationship between them. The danger became, day by day, more imminent. The scent of the Minotaur was all around. One evening the husband felt himself plunged into a mood of deep vexation so acute as to be apparent to his wife. His wife had begun to show him more kindness than she had ever exhibited, even during the honeymoon; and hence question after question racked his mind. On her part a dead silence reigned. The anxious questionings of his mind were redoubled; his suspicions burst forth, and he was seized with forebodings of future calamity! Now, on this occasion, he deftly applied a Japanese blister, which burned as fiercely as an *auto-da-fe* of the year 1600. At first his wife employed a thousand stratagems to discover whether the annoyance of her husband

was caused by the presence of her lover; it was her first intrigue and she displayed a thousand artifices in it. Her imagination was aroused; it was no longer taken up with her lover; had she not better, first of all, probe her husband's secret?

One evening the husband, moved by the desire to confide in his loving helpmeet all his troubles, informed her that their whole fortune was lost. They would have to give up their carriage, their box at the theatre, balls, parties, even Paris itself; perhaps, by living on their estate in the country a year or two, they might retrieve all! Appealing to the imagination of his wife, he told her how he pitied her for her attachment to a man who was indeed deeply in love with her, but was now without fortune; he tore his hair, and his wife was compelled in honor to be deeply moved; then in this first excitement of their conjugal disturbance he took her off to his estate. Then followed scarifications, mustard plaster upon mustard plaster, and the tails of fresh dogs were cut: he caused a Gothic wing to be built to the chateau; madame altered the park ten times over in order to have fountains and lakes and variations in the grounds; finally, the husband in the midst of her labors did not forget his own, which consisted in providing her with interesting reading, and launching upon her delicate attentions, etc. Notice, he never informed his wife of the trick he had played on her; and if his fortune was recuperated, it was directly after the building of the wing, and the expenditure of enormous sums in making water-courses; but he assured her that the lake provided a water-power by which mills might be run, etc.

Now, there was a conjugal blister well conceived, for this husband neither neglected to rear his family nor to invite to his house neighbors who were tiresome, stupid or old; and if he spent the winter in Paris, he flung his wife into the vortex of balls and races, so that she had not a minute to give to lovers, who are usually the fruit of a vacant life.

Journeys to Italy, Switzerland or Greece, sudden complaints which require a visit to the waters, and the most distant waters, are pretty good blisters. In fact, a man of sense should know how to manufacture a thousand of them.

Let us continue our examination of such personal methods.

And here we would have you observe that we are reasoning upon a hypothesis, without which this book will be unintelligible to you; namely, we suppose that your honeymoon has lasted for a respectable time and that the lady that you married was not a widow, but a maid; on the opposite supposition, it is at least in accordance with French manners to think that your wife married you merely for the purpose of becoming inconsistent.

From the moment when the struggle between virtue and inconsistency begins in your home, the whole question rests upon the constant and involuntary comparison which your wife is instituting between you and her lover.

And here you may find still another mode of defence, entirely personal, seldom employed by husbands, but the men of superiority will not fear to attempt it. It is to belittle the lover without letting your wife suspect your intention. You ought to

be able to bring it about so that she will say to herself some evening while she is putting her hair in curl-papers, "My husband is superior to him."

In order to succeed, and you ought to be able to succeed, since you have the immense advantage over the lover in knowing the character of your wife, and how she is most easily wounded, you should, with all the tact of a diplomat, lead this lover to do silly things and cause him to annoy her, without his being aware of it.

In the first place, this lover, as usual, will seek your friendship, or you will have friends in common; then, either through the instrumentality of these friends or by insinuations adroitly but treacherously made, you will lead him astray on essential points; and, with a little cleverness, you will succeed in finding your wife ready to deny herself to her lover when he calls, without either she or he being able to tell the reason. Thus you will have created in the bosom of your home a comedy in five acts, in which you play, to your profit, the brilliant role of Figaro or Almaviva; and for some months you will amuse yourself so much the more, because your *amour-propre*

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