

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE DEPUTY OF ARCIS

Оноре де Бальзак
The Deputy of Arcis

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Honoré de Balzac

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PART I. THE ELECTION

I. ALL ELECTIONS BEGIN WITH A BUSTLE

Before beginning to describe an election in the provinces, it is proper to state that the town of Arcis-sur-Aube was not the theatre of the events here related.

The arrondissement of Arcis votes at Bar-sur-Aube, which is forty miles from Arcis; consequently there is no deputy from Arcis in the Chamber.

Discretion, required in a history of contemporaneous manners and morals, dictates this precautionary word. It is rather an ingenious contrivance to make the description of one town the frame for events which happened in another; and several times already in the course of the *Comedy of Human Life*, this means has been employed in spite of its disadvantages, which consist chiefly in making the frame of as much importance as the canvas.

Toward the end of the month of April, 1839, about ten o'clock in the morning, the salon of Madame Marion, widow of a former receiver-general of the department of the Aube, presented a singular appearance. All the furniture had been removed except the curtains to the windows, the ornaments on the fireplace, the chandelier, and the tea-table. An Aubusson carpet, taken up two weeks before the usual time, obstructed the steps of the portico, and the floor had been violently rubbed and polished, though without increasing its usual brightness. All this was a species of domestic premonition concerning the result of the elections which were about to take place over the whole surface of France. Often things are as spiritually intelligent as men, – an argument in favor of the occult sciences.

The old man-servant of Colonel Giguet, Madame Marion's older brother, had just finished dusting the room; the chamber-maid and the cook were carrying, with an alacrity that denoted an enthusiasm equal to their attachment, all the chairs of the house, and piling them up in the garden, where the trees were already unfolding their leaves, through which the cloudless blue of the sky was visible. The springlike atmosphere and sun of May allowed the glass door and the two windows of the oblong salon to be kept open.

An old lady, Madame Marion herself, now ordered the two maids to place the chairs at one end of the salon, four rows deep, leaving between the rows a space of about three feet. When this was done, each row presented a front of ten chairs, all of divers species. A line of chairs was also placed along the wall, under the windows and before the glass door. At the other end of the salon, facing the forty chairs, Madame Marion placed three arm-chairs behind the tea-table, which was covered with a green cloth, on which she placed a bell.

Old Colonel Giguet arrived on this battle-field at the moment when his sister bethought herself of filling the empty spaces on either side of the fireplace with benches from the antechamber, disregarding the baldness of their velvet covers which had done good service for twenty-four years.

“We can seat seventy persons,” she said to her brother triumphantly.

“God grant that we may have seventy friends!” replied the colonel.

“If, after receiving every night, for twenty-four years, the whole society of Arcis-sur-Aube, a single one of my regular visitors fails us on this occasion – ” began the old lady, in a threatening manner.

“Pooh, pooh!” replied the colonel, interrupting his sister, “I’ll name you ten who cannot and ought not to come. First,” he said, beginning to count on his fingers, “Antonin Goulard, sub-prefect, for one; Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, there’s two; Monsieur Olivier Vinet, his substitute, three; Monsieur Martener, examining-judge, four; the justice of peace – ”

“But I am not so silly,” said the old lady, interrupting her brother in her turn, “as to expect office-holders to come to a meeting the object of which is to give another deputy to the Opposition. For all that, Antonin Goulard, Simon’s comrade and schoolmate, would be very well pleased to see him a deputy because – ”

“Come, sister, leave our own business of politics to us men. Where is Simon?”

“He is dressing,” she answered. “He was wise not to breakfast, for he is very nervous. It is queer that, though he is in the habit of speaking in court, he dreads this meeting as if he were certain to meet enemies.”

“Faith! I have often had to face masked batteries, and my soul – I won’t say my body – never quailed; but if I had to stand there,” said the old soldier, pointing to the tea-table, “and face forty bourgeois gaping at me, their eyes fixed on mine, and expecting sonorous and correct phrases, my shirt would be wringing wet before I could get out a word.”

“And yet, my dear father,” said Simon Giguët, entering from the smaller salon, “you really must make that effort for me; for if there is a man in the department of the Aube whose voice is all-powerful it is assuredly you. In 1815 – ”

“In 1815,” said the little old man, who was wonderfully well preserved, “I did not have to speak; I simply wrote out a little proclamation which brought us two thousand men in twenty-four hours. But it is a very different thing putting my name to a paper which is read by a department, and standing up before a meeting to make a speech. Napoleon himself failed there; at the 18th Brumaire he talked nothing but nonsense to the Five Hundred.”

“But, my dear father,” urged Simon, “it concerns my life, my fortune, my happiness. Fix your eyes on some one person and think you are talking to him, and you’ll get through all right.”

“Heavens!” cried Madame Marion, “I am only an old woman, but under such circumstances and knowing what depends on it, I – oh! I should be eloquent!”

“Too eloquent, perhaps,” said the colonel. “To go beyond the mark is not attaining it. But why make so much of all this?” he added, looking at his son. “It is only within the last two days you have taken up this candidacy of ideas; well, suppose you are not nominated, – so much the worse for Arcis, that’s all.”

These words were in keeping with the whole life of him who said them. Colonel Giguët was one of the most respected officers in the Grand Army, the foundation of his character being absolute integrity joined to extreme delicacy. Never did he put himself forward; favors, such as he received, sought him. For this reason he remained eleven years a mere captain of the artillery of the Guard, not receiving the rank of major until 1814. His almost fanatical attachment to Napoleon forbade his taking service under the Bourbons after the first abdication. In fact, his devotion in 1815 was such that he would have been banished with so many others if the Comte de Gondreville had not contrived to have his name effaced from the ordinance and put on the retired list with a pension, and the rank of colonel.

Madame Marion, *nee* Giguët, had another brother who was colonel of gendarmerie at Troyes, whom she followed to that town at an earlier period. It was there that she married Monsieur Marion, receiver-general of the Aube, who also had had a brother, the chief-justice of an imperial court. While a mere barrister at Arcis this young man had lent his name during the Terror to the famous Malin de l’Aube, the representative of the people, in order to hold possession of the estate of Gondreville. [See “An Historical Mystery.”] Consequently, all the support and influence of Malin, now become count and senator, was at the service of the Marion family. The barrister’s brother was made receiver-

general of the department, at a period when, far from having forty applicants for one place, the government was fortunate in getting any one to accept such a slippery office.

Marion, the receiver-general, inherited the fortune of his brother the chief-justice, and Madame Marion that of her brother the colonel of gendarmerie. In 1814, the receiver-general met with reverses. He died when the Empire died; but his widow managed to gather fifteen thousand francs a year from the wreck of his accumulated fortunes. The colonel of gendarmerie had left his property to his sister on learning the marriage of his brother the artillery officer to the daughter of a rich banker of Hamburg. It is well known what a fancy all Europe had for the splendid troopers of Napoleon!

In 1814, Madame Marion, half-ruined, returned to Arcis, her native place, where she bought, on the Grande-Place, one of the finest houses in the town. Accustomed to receive much company at Troyes, where the receiver-general reigned supreme, she now opened her salon to the notabilities of the liberal party in Arcis. A woman accustomed to the advantages of salon royalty does not easily renounce them. Vanity is the most tenacious of all habits.

Bonapartist, and afterwards a liberal – for, by the strangest of metamorphoses, the soldiers of Napoleon became almost to a man enamoured of the constitutional system – Colonel Giguet was, during the Restoration, the natural president of the governing committee of Arcis, which consisted of the notary Grevin, his son-in-law Beauvisage, and Varlet junior, the chief physician of Arcis, brother-in-law of Grevin, and a few other liberals.

“If our dear boy is not nominated,” said Madame Marion, having first looked into the antechamber and garden to make sure that no one overheard her, “he cannot have Mademoiselle Beauvisage; his success in this election means a marriage with Cecile.”

“Cecile!” exclaimed the old man, opening his eyes very wide and looking at his sister in stupefaction.

“There is no one but you in the whole department who would forget the *dot* and the expectations of Mademoiselle Beauvisage,” said his sister.

“She is the richest heiress in the department of the Aube,” said Simon Giguet.

“But it seems to me,” said the old soldier, “that my son is not to be despised as a match; he is your heir, he already has something from his mother, and I expect to leave him something better than a dry name.”

“All that put together won’t make thirty thousand a year, and suitors are already coming forward who have as much as that, not counting their position,” returned Madame Marion.

“And?” asked the colonel.

“They have been refused.”

“Then what do the Beauvisage family want?” said the colonel, looking alternately at his son and sister.

It may seem extraordinary that Colonel Giguet, the brother of Madame Marion in whose house the society of Arcis had met for twenty-four years, and whose salon was the echo of all reports, all scandals, and all the gossip of the department of the Aube, – a good deal of it being there manufactured, – should be ignorant of facts of this nature. But his ignorance will seem natural when we mention that this noble relic of the Napoleonic legions went to bed at night and rose in the morning with the chickens, as all old persons should do if they wish to live out their lives. He was never present at the intimate conversations which went on in the salon. In the provinces there are two sorts of intimate conversation, – one, which is held officially when all the company are gathered together, playing at cards or conversing; the other, which *simmers*, like a well made soup, when three or four friends remain around the fireplace, friends who can be trusted to repeat nothing of what is said beyond their own limits.

For nine years, ever since the triumph of his political ideas, the colonel had lived almost entirely outside of social life. Rising with the sun, he devoted himself to horticulture; he adored flowers, and of all flowers he best loved roses. His hands were brown as those of a real gardener; he took care

himself of his beds. Constantly in conference with his working gardener he mingled little, especially for the last two years, with the life of others; of whom, indeed, he saw little. He took but one meal with the family, namely, his dinner; for he rose too early to breakfast with his son and sister. To his efforts we owe the famous rose Giguet, known so well to all amateurs.

This old man, who had now passed into the state of a domestic fetich, was exhibited, as we may well suppose, on all extraordinary occasions. Certain families enjoy the benefit of a demi-god of this kind, and plume themselves upon him as they would upon a title.

“I have noticed,” replied Madame Marion to her brother’s question, “that ever since the revolution of July Madame Beauvisage has aspired to live in Paris. Obligated to stay here as long as her father lives, she has fastened her ambition on a future son-in-law, and my lady dreams now of the splendors and dignities of political life.”

“Could you love Cecile?” said the colonel to his son.

“Yes, father.”

“And does she like you?”

“I think so; but the thing is, to please the mother and grandfather. Though old Grevin himself wants to oppose my election, my success would determine Madame Beauvisage to accept me, because she expects to manage me as she pleases and to be minister under my name.”

“That’s a good joke!” cried Madame Marion. “What does she take us for?”

“Whom has she refused?” asked the colonel.

“Well, within the last three months, Antonin Goulard and the *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest, have received, so they say, equivocal answers which mean anything —*except yes*.”

“Heavens!” cried the old man throwing up his arms. “What days we live in, to be sure! Why, Lucie was the daughter of a hosier, and the grand-daughter of a farmer. Does Madame Beauvisage want the Comte de Cinq-Cygne for a son-in-law?”

“Don’t laugh at Madame Beauvisage, brother. Cecile is rich enough to choose a husband anywhere, even in the class to which the Cinq-Cygnés belong. But there’s the bell announcing the electors, and I disappear – regretting much I can’t hear what you are all going to say.”

II. REVOLT OF A LIBERAL ROTTEN-BOROUGH

Though 1839 is, politically speaking, very distant from 1847, we can still remember the elections produced by the Coalition, an ephemeral effort of the Chamber of Deputies to realize the threat of parliamentary government, – a threat *a la* Cromwell, which without a Cromwell could only end, under a prince “the enemy of fraud,” in the triumph of the present system, by which the Chambers and the ministers are like the wooden puppets which the proprietor of the Guignolet shows exhibits to the great satisfaction of wonder-stricken idlers in the streets.

The arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube then found itself in a singular position. It supposed itself free to choose its deputy. From 1816 to 1836 it had always elected one of the heaviest orators of the Left, belonging to the famous seventeen who were called “Great Citizens” by the liberal party, – namely, Francois Keller, of the house of Keller Bros., the son-in-law of the Comte de Gondreville. Gondreville, one of the most magnificent estates in France, is situated about a mile from Arcis.

This banker, recently made count and peer of France, expected, no doubt, to transfer to his son, then thirty years of age, his electoral succession, in order to make him some day eligible for the peerage. Already a major on the staff and a great favorite of the prince-royal, Charles Keller, now a viscount, belonged to the court party of the citizen-king. The most brilliant future seemed pledged to a young man enormously rich, full of energy, already remarkable for his devotion to the new dynasty, the grandson of the Comte de Gondreville, and nephew of the Marechal de Carigliano; but this election, so necessary to his future prospects, presented suddenly certain difficulties to overcome.

Since the accession to power of the bourgeois class, Arcis had felt a vague desire to show itself independent. Consequently, the last election of Francois Keller had been disturbed by certain republicans, whose red caps and long beards had not, however, seriously alarmed the bourgeois of Arcis. By canvassing the country carefully the radical candidate would be able to secure some thirty or forty votes. A few of the townspeople, humiliated at seeing their town always treated as a rotten borough, joined the democrats, though enemies to democracy. In France, under the system of balloting, politico-chemical products are formed in which the laws of affinity are reversed.

Now, to elect young Keller in 1839, after having elected his father for twenty years, would show a monstrous electoral servitude, against which the pride of the newly enriched bourgeoisie revolved, for they felt themselves to be fully worth either Monsieur Malin, otherwise called Comte de Gondreville, the Keller Bros., the Cinq-Cygnés, or even, the King of the French.

The numerous partisans of old Gondreville, the king of the department of the Aube, were therefore awaiting some fresh proof of his ability, already so thoroughly tested, to circumvent this rising revolt. In order not to compromise the influence of his family in the arrondissement of Arcis, that old statesman would doubtless propose for candidate some young man who could be induced to accept an official function and then yield his place to Charles Keller, – a parliamentary arrangement which renders the elect of the people subject to re-election.

When Simon Giguët sounded the old notary Grevin, the faithful friend of the Comte de Gondreville, on the subject of the elections, the old man replied that, while he did not know the intentions of the Comte de Gondreville, he should himself vote for Charles Keller and employ his influence for that election.

As soon as this answer of old Grevin had circulated through Arcis, a reaction against him set in. Although for thirty years this provincial Aristides possessed the confidence of the whole town, – having been mayor of Arcis from 1804 to 1814 and again during the Hundred Days, – and although the Opposition had accepted him as their leader until the triumph of 1830, at which period he refused the honors of the mayoralty on the ground of his great age, and finally, although the town, in order to manifest its affection for him, elected his son-in-law, Monsieur Beauvisage, mayor in his stead, it now revolted against him and some young striplings went so far as to talk of his dotage. The partisans

of Simon Giguet then turned to Phileas Beauvisage, the mayor, and won him over the more easily to their side because, without having quarrelled with his father-in-law, he assumed an independence of him which had ended in coldness, – an independence that the sly old notary allowed him to maintain, seeing in it an excellent means of action on the town of Arcis.

The mayor, questioned the evening before in the open street, declared positively that he should cast his vote for the first-comer on the list of eligibles rather than give it to Charles Keller, for whom, however, he had a high esteem.

“Arcis shall be no longer a rotten borough!” he said, “or I’ll emigrate to Paris.”

Flatter the passions of the moment and you will always be a hero, even at Arcis-sur-Aube.

“Monsieur le maire,” said everybody, “gives noble proof of his firmness of character.”

Nothing progresses so rapidly as a legal revolt. That evening Madame Marion and her friends organized for the morrow a meeting of “independent electors” in the interests of Simon Giguet, the colonel’s son. The morrow had now come and had turned the house topsy-turvy to receive the friends on whose independence the leaders of the movement counted. Simon Giguet, the native-born candidate of a little town jealously desirous to elect a son of its own, had, as we have seen, put to profit this desire; and yet, the whole prosperity and fortune of the Giguet family were the work of the Comte de Gondreville. But when it comes to an election, what are sentiments!

This Scene is written for the information of countries so unfortunate as not to know the blessings of national representation, and which are, therefore, ignorant by what intestinal convulsions, what Brutus-like sacrifices, a little town gives birth to a deputy. Majestic but natural spectacle, which may, indeed, be compared with that of childbirth, – the same throes, the same impurities, the same lacerations, the same final triumph!

It may be asked why an only son, whose fortune was sufficient, should be, like Simon Giguet, an ordinary barrister in a little country town where barristers are pretty nearly useless. A word about the candidate is therefore necessary.

Colonel Giguet had had, between 1806 and 1813, by his wife who died in 1814, three children, the eldest of whom, Simon, alone survived. Until he became an only child, Simon was brought up as a youth to whom the exercise of a profession would be necessary. And about the time he became by the death of his brothers the family heir, the young man met with a serious disappointment. Madame Marion had counted much, for her nephew, on the inheritance of his grandfather the banker of Hamburg. But when that old German died in 1826, he left his grandson Giguet a paltry two thousand francs a year. The worthy banker, endowed with great procreative powers, having soothed the worries of business by the pleasures of paternity, favored the families of eleven other children who surrounded him, and who made him believe, with some appearance of justice, that Simon Giguet was already a rich man.

Besides all this, the colonel was bent on giving his son an independent position, and for this reason: the Giguets could not expect any government favors under the Restoration. Even if Simon had not been the son of an ardent Bonapartist, he belonged to a family whose members had justly incurred the animosity of the Cinq-Cygne family, owing to the part which Giguet, the colonel of gendarmerie, and the Marions, including Madame Marion, had taken as witnesses on the famous trial of the Messieurs de Simeuse, unjustly condemned in 1805 for the abduction of the Comte de Gondreville, then senator, and formerly representative of the people, who had despoiled the Cinq-Cygne family of their property. [See “An Historical Mystery.”]

Grevin was not only one of the most important witnesses at that trial, but he was one of the chief promoters of the prosecution. That affair divides to this day the arrondissement of Arcis into two parties; one of which declares the innocence of the condemned; the other standing by the Comte de Gondreville and his adherents. Though, under the Restoration, the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne used all the influence the return of the Bourbons gave her to arrange things as she wished in the department of the Aube, the Comte de Gondreville contrived to counterbalance this Cinq-Cygne royalty by the

secret authority he wielded over the liberals of the town through the notary Grevin, Colonel Giguet, his son-in-law Keller (always elected deputy in spite of the Cinq-Cygnés), and also by the credit he maintained, as long as Louis XVIII. lived, in the counsels of the crown. It was not until after the death of that king that the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne was able to get Michu appointed judge of the court of assizes in Arcis. She desired of all things to obtain this place for the son of the steward who had perished on the scaffold at Troyes, the victim of his devotion to the Simeuse family, whose full-length portrait always hung in her salon, whether in Paris or at Cinq-Cygne. Until 1823 the Comte de Gondreville had possessed sufficient power over Louis XVIII. to prevent this appointment of Michu.

It was by the advice of the Comte de Gondreville that Colonel Giguet made his son a lawyer. Simon had all the more opportunity of shining at the bar in the arrondissement of Arcis because he was the only barrister, solicitors pleading their own cases in these petty localities. The young man had really secured certain triumphs in the court of assizes of the Aube, but he was none the less an object of derision to Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, Olivier Vinet, the substitute *procureur*, and the judge, Michu, – the three best minds in the court.

Simon Giguet, like other men, paid goodly tribute to the mighty power of ridicule that pursued him. He liked to hear himself talk, and he talked on all occasions; he solemnly delivered himself of dry and long-winded sentences which passed for eloquence among the upper bourgeoisie of Arcis. The poor fellow belonged to that species of bore which desires to explain everything, even the simplest thing. He explained rain; he explained the revolution of July; he explained things impenetrable; he explained Louis-Philippe, Odilon Barrot, Monsieur Thiers, the Eastern Question; he explained Champagne; he explained 1788; he explained the tariff of custom houses and humanitarians, magnetism and the economy of the civil list.

This lean young man, with a bilious skin, tall enough to justify his sonorous nullity (for it is rare that a tall man does not have eminent faculties of some kind) outdid the puritanism of the votaries of the extreme Left, all of them so sensitive, after the manner of prudens who have their intrigues to hide. Dressed invariably in black, he wore a white cravat which came down low on his chest, so that his face seemed to issue from a horn of white paper, for the collar of his shirt was high and stiff after a fashion now, fortunately, exploded. His trousers and his coats were always too large for him. He had what is called in the provinces dignity; that is to say, he was stiffly erect and pompously dull in manner. His friend, Antonin Goulard, accused him of imitating Monsieur Dupin. And in truth, the young barrister was apt to wear shoes and stout socks of black filoselle.

Protected by the respect that every one bore to his father, and by the influence exercised by his aunt over a little town whose principal inhabitants had frequented her salon for many years, Simon Giguet, possessing already ten thousand francs a year, not counting the fees of his profession and the fortune his aunt would not fail to leave him, felt no doubt of his election. Nevertheless, the first sound of the bell announcing the arrival of the most influential electors echoed in the heart of the ambitious aspirant and filled it with vague fears. Simon did not conceal from himself the cleverness and the immense resources of old Grevin, nor the prestige attending the means that would surely be employed by the ministry to promote the candidacy of a young and dashing officer then in Africa, attached to the staff of the prince-royal.

“I think,” he said to his father, “that I have the colic; I feel a warmth at the pit of my stomach that makes me very uneasy.”

“Old soldiers,” replied the colonel, “have the same feeling when they hear the cannon beginning to growl at the opening of a battle.”

“What will it be in the Chamber!” said the barrister.

“The Comte de Gondreville told me,” said the old colonel, “that he has known more than one orator affected with the qualms which precede, even with us old fire-eaters, the opening of a battle. But all this is idle talk. You want to be a deputy,” added the old man, shrugging his shoulders, “then be one!”

“Father, the real triumph will be Cecile! Cecile has an immense fortune. Now-a-days an immense fortune means power.”

“Dear me! how times have changed! Under the Emperor men had to be brave.”

“Each epoch is summed up in a phrase,” said Simon, recalling an observation of the Comte de Gondreville, which paints that personage well. He remarked: “Under the Empire, when it was desirable to destroy a man, people said, ‘He is a coward.’ To-day we say, ‘He is a cheat.’”

“Poor France! where are they leading you?” cried the colonel; “I shall go back to my roses.”

“Oh, stay, father! You are the keystone of the arch.”

III. OPPOSITION DEFINES ITSELF

The mayor, Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage, was the first to present himself, accompanied by the successor of his father-in-law, the busiest notary in town, Achille Pigoult, grandson of an old man who had continued justice of the peace in Arcis during the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration. Achille Pigoult, thirty-two years of age, had been eighteen years a clerk in Grevin's office with no means of becoming himself a notary. His father, son of the justice of peace, had died of a so-called apoplexy, having gone wrong in business.

The Comte de Gondreville, however, with whom old Pigoult had relations dating back to 1793, lent money for the necessary security, and thus enabled the grandson of the judge who made the first examination in the Simeuse case to buy the practice of his master, Grevin. Achille had set up his office in the Place de l'Eglise, in a house belonging to the Comte de Gondreville, which the latter had leased to him at so low a price that any one could see how desirous that crafty politician was to hold the leading notary of Arcis in the hollow of his hand.

Young Pigoult, a short, skinny man, whose eyes seemed to pierce the green spectacles which could not modify the spitefulness of his glance, well-informed as to all the interests of the neighborhood, owing his aptitude in managing affairs to a certain facility of speech, passed for what is called a *quizzer*, saying things plainly and with more cleverness than the aborigines could put into their conversations. Still a bachelor, he was awaiting a rich marriage through the offices of his two protectors, Grevin and the Comte de Gondreville. Consequently, barrister Giguet was not a little surprised on seeing Achille appear at the meeting in company with Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage.

The notary, whose face was so seamed by the smallpox that it seemed to be covered with a white net, formed a perfect contrast to the rotund person of the mayor, whose face resembled a full moon, but a warm and lively moon; its tones of lily and of rose being still further brightened by a gracious smile, the result not so much of a disposition of the soul as of that formation of the lips for which the word "simpering" seems to have been created. Phileas Beauvisage was endowed with so great a contentment with himself that he smiled on all the world and under all circumstances. Those simpering lips smiled at a funeral. The liveliness that abounded in his infantine blue eyes did not contradict that perpetual and well-nigh intolerable smile.

This internal satisfaction passed all the more readily for benevolence and affability, because Phileas had made himself a language of his own, remarkable for its immoderate use of the formulas of politeness. He always "had the honor"; to all his inquiries as to the health of absent persons he added the adjectives "dear," "good," "excellent." He lavished condoling or congratulatory phrases apropos of all the petty miseries and all the little felicities of life. He concealed under a deluge of commonplaces his native incapacity, his total want of education, and a weakness of character which can only be expressed by the old word "weathercock." Be not uneasy: the weathercock had for its axis the beautiful Madame Beauvisage, Severine Grevin, the most remarkable woman in the arrondissement.

When Severine heard of what she called her husband's "freak" as to the election, she said to him on the morning of the meeting at Madame Marion's: —

"It was well enough to give yourself an air of independence; but you mustn't go to that Giguet meeting unless Achille Pigoult accompanies you; I've told him to come and take you."

Giving Achille Pigoult as mentor to Beauvisage meant sending a spy from the Gondreville party to the Giguet assemblage. We may therefore imagine the grimace which contracted the puritan visage of Simon, who was forced to welcome graciously an *habitué* of his aunt's salon and an influential elector, in whom, nevertheless, he saw an enemy.

"Ah!" he thought to himself, "what a mistake I made in refusing him that security when he asked for it! Old Gondreville had more sense than I — Good-day to you, Achille," he said, assuming a jaunty manner; "I suppose you mean to trip me up."

“Your meeting isn’t a conspiracy against the independence of our votes,” replied the notary, smiling. “We are all playing above-board, I take it.”

“Above-board,” echoed Beauvisage.

And the mayor began to laugh with that expressionless laugh by which some persons end all their sentences; which may, perhaps, be called the *ritornello* of their conversation. After which he placed himself in what we must describe as his third position, standing full-front, his chest expanded, and his hands behind his back. He was dressed in black coat and trousers, with an effulgent white waistcoat, opened in such a way as to show two diamond shirt-buttons worth several thousand francs.

“We shall fight, but we shall not be the less good friends,” he said. “That is the essence of constitutional morals; he! he! he! That is how *I* understand the alliance of monarchy with liberty; ha! ha! ha!”

Whereupon the mayor took Simon’s hand, saying:

“How are you, my good friend? Your dear aunt and our worthy colonel are no doubt as well to-day as they were yesterday, – that is, I presume so, – he! he! he!” adding, with an air of perfect beatitude, “perhaps a little agitated by the ceremony now about to take place. Ha! ha! young man; so we intend to enter a political career? Ha! ha! ha! This is our first step – mustn’t step back – it is a great career. I’d rather it were you than I to rush into the storms and tempests of the legislative body, hi! hi! – however agreeable it may be to see that body in our own person, hi! hi! hi! – the sovereign power of France in one four hundred and fifty-third! Hi! hi! hi!”

The vocal organ of Phileas Beauvisage had an agreeable sonority altogether in harmony with the leguminous curves of his face (of the color of a light yellow pumpkin), his solid back, and his broadly expanded chest. That voice, bass in volume, could soften to a baritone and utter, in the giggle with which Phileas ended his phrases, a silvery note. When God desired, in order to place all species of mankind in this his terrestrial paradise, to create within it a provincial bourgeois, his hands never made a more perfect and complete type than Phileas Beauvisage.

“I admire,” said that great work, “the devotion of those who fling themselves into the tumult of political life; he! he! he! It takes more nerve than I possess. Who could have told us in 1812 or 1813 that we should come to this? As for me, nothing can surprise me in these days, when asphalt, India-rubber, railroads, and steam have changed the ground we tread on, and overcoats, and distances, he, he!”

These last words were seasoned with a prolonged laugh, and accompanied by a gesture which he had made more especially his own: he closed his right fist, struck it into the rounded palm of his left hand, and rubbed it there with joyous satisfaction. This performance coincided with his laughs on the frequent occasions when he thought he had said a witty thing. Perhaps it is superfluous to add that Phileas Beauvisage was regarded in Arcis as an amiable and charming man.

“I shall endeavor,” replied Simon Giguet, “to worthily represent – ”

“The sheep of Champagne,” interpolated Achille Pigoult, interrupting him.

The candidate swallowed that shaft without reply, for he was forced at that moment to go forward and receive two more influential electors.

One was the landlord of the Mulet, the best inn in Arcis, standing on the Grande-Place at the corner of the rue de Brienne. This worthy landlord, named Poupart, had married the sister of a manservant attached to the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, the well-known Gothard, one of the actors and witnesses in the Simeuse affair.

Poupart, though a most devoted adherent of the Cinq-Cygne family, had been sounded during the last day or two, by Colonel Giguet’s valet, with so much cleverness and perseverance that he thought he was doing an ill-turn to the Comte de Gondreville, the enemy of the Cinq-Cygnés, by giving his influence to the election of Simon Giguet; and he was now conversing on that point with the man who accompanied him, an apothecary named Fromaget, who, as he did not furnish his wares to the chateau de Gondreville, desired nothing better than to cabal against the Kellers.

These two individuals of the lesser bourgeoisie could, in consequence of their connections, determine a certain number of floating votes, for they influenced and advised a number of persons to whom the political opinions of the candidate were a matter of indifference. Consequently, Simon took possession of Poupart, and delivered the apothecary Fromaget to his father, who had just come in to make his bow to the electors.

The sub-engineer of the arrondissement, the secretary of the mayor's office, four sheriffs, three solicitors, the clerk of the court, and the clerk of the justice of the peace, the registry-clerk, and the tax-collector, all officials under government, two doctors, rivals of Varlet, Grevin's brother-in-law, a miller named Laurent Goussard, the head of the republicans of Arcis, the two assistant mayors, the printer and publisher of Arcis, and about a dozen other bourgeois arrived in succession, and walked about the garden until the gathering seemed numerous enough to admit of opening the session.

At length, about mid-day, fifty men, all in their best clothes, – most of them having come out of curiosity to see the handsome salons which were much talked of throughout the arrondissement, – were seated on the chairs Madame Marion had provided for them. The windows were left open, and presently so deep a silence reigned that the rustle of Madame Marion's gown was heard, – that good woman not being able to resist the pleasure of descending to the garden and placing herself in a corner whence she could listen to what went on in the salon. The cook, the chamber-maid, and the manservant stood in the dining-room and shared the emotions of their masters.

"Messieurs," said Simon Giguët, "some among you desire to honor my father by asking him to preside at this meeting; but Colonel Giguët requests me to present his thanks, and express due gratitude for a desire in which he sees a reward for his services to the country. We are in his house; he thinks he ought, therefore, to decline those functions, and he desires to propose in his stead an honorable merchant on whom your suffrages have already bestowed the chief magistracy of this town, Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage."

"Bravo! bravo!"

"We are, I think, all of one mind in adopting for this meeting – essentially friendly, but entirely free, which will prejudice in no way whatever the great preparatory and primary meeting in which you will produce your candidates and weigh their merits – in adopting, as I said, the parliamentary and constitutional – forms – of the – electoral Chamber."

"Yes, yes!" cried the assembly with one voice.

"Consequently," continued Simon, "I have the honor to request, according to the wish of all present, that his honor the mayor will now take the chair."

Phileas rose and crossed the salon, conscious that he was becoming as red as a cherry. Then, when he stood behind the table, he saw, not a hundred eyes, but a hundred thousand candles. The sun seemed to him to be setting fire to the salon, and he had, to use his own expression, a lump of salt in his throat.

"Return thanks," said Simon, in a low voice.

"Messieurs –"

Such total silence ensued that Phileas had a spasm of colic.

"What must I say, Simon?" he whispered.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Achille Pigoult.

"Messieurs," said Simon, goaded by the sarcastic interjection of the little notary, "the honor which you have done to Monsieur le Maire may take him unawares, but it cannot surprise him."

"That's it," said Beauvisage; "I am too sensible of this attention on the part of my fellow-citizens not to be excessively flattered by it."

"Bravo!" cried the notary alone.

"The devil take me!" thought Beauvisage, "if I am ever caught haranguing again."

"Will Messieurs Fromaget and Marcelin accept the functions of inspectors of the ballot?"

“It would be more regular,” said Achille Pigoult, rising, “if the meeting itself nominated those officers, – following, of course, the parliamentary forms of the Chamber.”

“That is best,” said the huge Monsieur Mollot, clerk of the court; “otherwise what is here taking place would be a mere farce; we should not be free in our action, in which case we might as well continue to do the will of Monsieur Simon Giguét.”

Simon said a few words to Beauvisage, who rose and delivered himself of a “Messieurs!” in palpitating tones.

“Pardon me, Monsieur le president,” said Achille Pigoult, “the chairman presides, he does not speak.”

“Messieurs,” continued Beauvisage, prompted by Simon, “if we are – to conform – to parliamentary usage – I shall beg – the honorable gentleman – Monsieur Pigoult – to address the meeting – from this table – here present – ”

Pigoult sprang to the table, stood beside it with his fingers resting lightly on its edge, and gave proof of his boldness by delivering the following speech without the slightest embarrassment, and somewhat after the manner of the illustrious Monsieur Thiers.

“Messieurs, it was not I who made that proposal for parliamentary usage; nevertheless I can conceive that an assemblage of some sixty notabilities of Champagne needs a chairman to guide it; for no flock can get on without a shepherd. If we had voted for secret balloting, I am certain that the name of our excellent mayor would have been returned unanimously. His opposition to the candidate put forward by his relations proves to us that he possesses civic courage in the highest degree, inasmuch as he has dared to free himself from the closest ties – those of family. Patriotism before family! that is indeed so great an effort that, to make it, we are forced to believe that Brutus from his realm of justice still contemplates us after the lapse of two thousand, five hundred and some years. It seemed natural to Maitre Giguét, who had the merit of divining our wishes in the choice of a chairman, to guide us still further in electing inspectors; but, if I am not mistaken, you think with me that once is enough – and you are right. Our mutual friend, Simon Giguét, who intends to offer himself as candidate, would have the air of assuming mastery, and he might, consequently, lose in our minds the good-will we should otherwise bestow upon a modest attitude like that of his venerable father. Now what is our worthy chairman doing at this moment by accepting the method of presiding suggested to him by the candidate? He is depriving us of our liberty! I ask you: is it proper that the chairman of our choice should tell us to nominate, by rising or sitting, inspectors of the ballot thus forced upon us? Have we any liberty of choice? If I were proposed, I believe all present would rise out of politeness; indeed, we should all feel bound to rise for one another, and I say there can be no choice where there is no freedom of action.”

“He is right,” said the sixty auditors.

“Therefore, let us each write two names on a ballot, and the two gentlemen who are elected will then feel themselves the real choice of this assembly; they will have the right, conjointly with our honorable chairman, to pronounce upon the majority when we come to a vote on the resolutions to be offered. We are here, I think, to promise to a candidate the fullest support that each can give at the coming primary meeting of all the electors of the arrondissement. This act is therefore, and I so declare it, a grave one. Does it not concern one four-hundredth part of the governing power, – as our excellent mayor has lately said with the ready wit that characterizes him and for which we have so high an appreciation?”

During these remarks Colonel Giguét was cutting a sheet of paper into strips, and Simon had sent for pens and ink.

This preliminary discussion on forms had already made Simon extremely uneasy, and had also aroused the attention of the sixty assembled bourgeois. Presently they began to write their ballots, and the wily Pigoult contrived to obtain a majority for Monsieur Mollot, the clerk of the court, and

Monsieur Godivet, the registrar. These nominations were naturally very displeasing to Fromaget, the apothecary, and Marcelin the solicitor.

“You enable us,” said Achille Pigoult, “to manifest our independence. Therefore you may feel more pride in being rejected than you could have felt in being chosen.”

Everybody laughed.

Simon Giguet then produced silence by demanding speech of the chairman, whose shirt was already wet and became still wetter as he mustered all his courage to say: —

“Monsieur Simon Giguet has the floor.”

IV. THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY TEMPEST

“Messieurs,” said Simon Giguet, “I ask permission to thank Monsieur Achille Pigoult, who, although our meeting is altogether friendly – ”

“It is a meeting preparatory to the great primary meeting,” said the solicitor Marcelin.

“That is what I was about to explain,” resumed Simon, “I thank Monsieur Achille Pigoult for having insisted on the strictness of parliamentary forms. This is the first time that the arrondissement of Arcis has been at liberty to use – ”

“At liberty!” said Pigoult, interrupting the orator.

“At liberty!” cried the assembly.

“At liberty,” continued Simon Giguet, “to use its rights in the great battle of a general election to the Chamber of Deputies; and as, in a few days, we shall have a meeting, at which all electors will be present, to judge of the merits of the candidates, we ought to feel ourselves most fortunate in becoming accustomed here, in this limited meeting, to the usages of great assemblies. We shall be all the more able to decide the political future of the town of Arcis; for the question now is to substitute a town’s interests for family interests, a whole region for a man.”

Simon then reviewed the history of the Arcis elections for the last twenty years. While approving the constant election of Francois Keller, he said the moment had now come to shake off the yoke of the house of Gondreville. Arcis ought to be no more a fief of the liberals than a fief of the Cinq-Cygnés. Advanced opinions were arising in France of which the Kellers were not the exponents. Charles Keller, having become a viscount, belonged to the court; he could have no independence, because, in presenting him as candidate, his family thought much more of making him succeed to his father’s peerage than of benefiting his constituency as deputy, etc., etc. And, finally, Simon presented himself to the choice of his fellow-citizens, pledging his word to sit on the same bench with the illustrious Odilon Barrot, and never to desert the glorious flag of Progress.

Progress! one of those words behind which more flimsy ambitions than ideas were trying to group themselves; for, after 1830, it represented only the pretensions of a few hungry democrats. Nevertheless, this word had still a great effect upon Arcis, and gave stability to whosoever might inscribe it on his banner. To call himself a man of progress was to declare himself a philosopher in all things and a puritan in politics; it declared him in favor of railroads, mackintoshes, penitentiaries, wooden pavements, Negro freedom, savings-banks, seamless shoes, lighting by gas, asphalt pavements, universal suffrage, and reduction of the civil list. In short, it meant pronouncing himself against the treaties of 1815, against the Eldest Branch, against the colossus of the North, perfidious Albion, against all enterprises, good or bad, of the government. Thus we see that the word *progress* might signify “No,” as well as “Yes.” It was gilding put upon the word *liberalism*, a new password for new ambitions.

“If I have rightly understood what this meeting is for,” said Jean Violette, a stocking-maker, who had recently bought the Beauvisage house, “it is to pledge ourselves to support, by employing every means in our power, Monsieur Simon Giguet at the elections as deputy in place of Comte Francois Keller. If each of us intends to coalesce in this manner we have only to say plainly Yes or No on that point.”

“That is going too quickly to the point! Political affairs do not advance in that way, or there would be no politics at all!” cried Pigoult, whose old grandfather, eighty-six years old, had just entered the room. “The last speaker undertakes to decide what seems to me, according to my feeble lights, the very object we are met to discuss. I demand permission to speak.”

“Monsieur Achille Pigoult has the floor,” said Beauvisage, at last able to pronounce that phrase with all his municipal and constitutional dignity.

“Messieurs,” said the notary, “if there is a house in Arcis in which no voice should be raised against the influence of the Comte de Gondreville, it is surely the one we are now in. The worthy Colonel Giguet is the only person in it who has not sought the benefits of the senatorial power; he, at least, has never asked anything of the Comte de Gondreville, who took his name off the list of exiles in 1815 and caused him to receive the pension which the colonel now enjoys without lifting a finger to obtain it.”

A murmur, flattering to the old soldier, greeted this observation.

“But,” continued the orator, “the Marions are covered with the count’s benefits. Without that influence, the late Colonel Giguet would not have commanded the gendarmerie of the Aube. The late Monsieur Marion would not have been chief-justice of the Imperial court without the protection of the count, to whom I myself have every reason to be thankful. You will therefore think it natural that I should be his advocate within these walls. There are, indeed, few persons in this arrondissement who have not received benefits from that family.”

[Murmurs.]

“A candidate puts himself in the stocks,” continued Achille Pigoult, warming up. “I have the right to scrutinize his life before I invest him with my powers. I do not desire ingratitude in the delegate I may help to send to the Chamber, for ingratitude is like misfortune – one ingratitude leads to others. We have been, he tells us, the stepping-stone of the Kellers; well, from what I have heard here, I am afraid we may become the stepping-stone of the Giguets. We live in a practical age, do we not? Well, then, let us examine into what will be the results to the arrondissement of Arcis if Simon Giguet is elected. They talk to you of independence! Simon, whom I thus maltreat as candidate, is my personal friend, as he is that of all who hear me, and I should myself be charmed to see him the orator of the Left, seated between Garnier-Pages and Lafitte; but how would that benefit the arrondissement? The arrondissement would lose the support of the Comte de Gondreville and the Kellers. We all, in the course of five years, have had and shall have need of the one and of the others. Some have gone to the Marechale de Carigliano to obtain the release of a young fellow who had drawn a bad number. Others have had recourse to the influence of the Kellers in many matters which are decided according to their recommendation. We have always found the old Comte de Gondreville ready to do us service. It is enough to belong to Arcis to obtain admission to him without being forced to kick our heels in his antechamber. Those two families know every one in Arcis. Where is the financial influence of the Giguets, and what power have they with the ministry? Have they any standing at the Bourse? When we want to replace our wretched wooden bridge with one of stone can they obtain from the department and the State the necessary funds? By electing Charles Keller we shall cement a bond of friendship which has never, to this day, failed to do us service. By electing my good, my excellent schoolmate, my worthy friend Simon Giguet, we shall realize nothing but losses until the far-distant time when he becomes a minister. I know his modesty well enough to be certain he will not contradict me when I say that I doubt his election to the post of deputy.” [Laughter.] “I have come to this meeting to oppose a course which I regard as fatal to our arrondissement. Charles Keller belongs to the court, they say to me. Well, so much the better! we shall not have to pay the costs of his political apprenticeship; he knows the affairs of the country; he knows parliamentary necessities; he is much nearer being a statesman than my friend Simon, who will not pretend to have made himself a Pitt or a Talleyrand in a little town like Arcis – ”

“Danton went from it!” cried Colonel Giguet, furious at Achille’s speech and the justice of it.

“Bravo!”

This was an acclamation, and sixty persons clapped their hands.

“My father has a ready wit,” whispered Simon Giguet to Beauvisage.

“I do not understand why, apropos of an election,” continued the old colonel, rising suddenly, with the blood boiling in his face, “we should be hauled up for the ties which connect us with the Comte de Gondreville. My son’s fortune comes from his mother; he has asked nothing of the Comte

de Gondreville. The comte might never have existed and Simon would have been what he now is, – the son of a colonel of artillery who owes his rank to his services; a man whose opinions have never varied. I should say openly to the Comte de Gondreville if he were present: ‘We have elected your son-in-law for twenty years; to-day we wish to prove that in so doing we acted of our own free-will, and we now elect a man of Arcis, in order to show that the old spirit of 1789, to which you owe your fortune, still lives in the land of Danton, Malin, Grevin, Pigoult, Marion – That is all!’

And the old man sat down. Whereupon a great hubbub arose. Achille opened his mouth to reply. Beauvisage, who would not have thought himself chairman unless he had rung his bell, increased the racket, and called for silence. It was then two o’clock.

‘I shall take the liberty to observe to the honorable Colonel Giguet, whose feelings are easily understood, that he took upon himself to speak, which is against parliamentary usage,’ said Achille Pigoult.

‘I think it is not necessary to call the colonel to order,’ said the chairman. ‘He is a father – ’
Silence was re-established.

‘We did not come here,’ cried Fromaget, ‘to say Amen to everything the Messieurs Giguet, father and son, may wish – ’

‘No! no!’ cried the assembly.

‘Things are going badly,’ said Madame Marion to her cook in the garden.

‘Messieurs,’ resumed Achille, ‘I confine myself to asking my friend Simon Giguet, categorically, what he expects to do for our interests.’

‘Yes! yes!’ cried the assembly.

‘Since when,’ demanded Simon Giguet, ‘have good citizens like those of Arcis made trade and barter of the sacred mission of deputy?’

It is impossible to represent the effect produced by noble sentiments on a body of men. They will applaud fine maxims, while they none the less vote for the degradation of their country, like the galley-slave who shouted for the punishment of Robert Macaire when he saw the thing played, and then went off and killed his own Monsieur Germeuil.

‘Bravo!’ cried several true-blood Giguet electors.

‘You will send me to the Chamber,’ went on Simon, ‘if you do send me, to represent principles, the principles of 1789; to be one of the ciphers, if you choose, of the Opposition, but a cipher that votes with it to enlighten the government, make war against abuses, and promote progress in all things – ’

‘What do you call progress?’ asked Fromaget. ‘For us, progress means getting the waste lands of la Champagne under cultivation.’

‘Progress! I will explain to you what I mean by that,’ cried Giguet, exasperated by the interruption.

‘It is the frontier of the Rhine for France,’ put in the colonel, ‘and the destruction of the treaties of 1815.’

‘It is selling wheat dear and keeping bread cheap,’ cried Achille Pigoult sarcastically, thinking that he made a joke, but actually expressing one of the delusions that reign in France.

‘It is the happiness of all, obtained by the triumph of humanitarian doctrines,’ continued Simon.

‘What did I tell you?’ said Achille to his neighbors.

‘Hush! silence! let us listen!’ said various voices.

‘Messieurs,’ said the stout Mollot, smiling, ‘the debate is beginning; give your attention to the orator; and let him explain himself.’

‘In all transitional epochs, Messieurs,’ continued Simon, gravely, ‘and we are now in such an epoch – ’

“Ba-a-a! ba-a-a!” bleated a friend of Achille Pigoult, who possessed the faculty (precious at elections) of ventriloquism.

A roar of laughter came from the whole assembly, who were Champagnards before all else. Simon Giguët folded his arms and waited till the tumult subsided.

“If it was intended to give me a lesson,” he resumed, “and to tell me that I belong to the flock of the glorious defenders of the rights of humanity, the flock of the immortal priest who pleads for dying Poland, the daring pamphleteers, the scrutinizers of the civil test, the philosophers who demand sincerity in the working of our institutions, if that was the intention of my nameless interrupter, I thank him. To me, progress is the realization of all that was promised to us by the revolution of July; it is electoral reform, it is – ”

“What! are you a democrat?” said Achille Pigoult.

“No,” replied the candidate. “To desire the legitimate and regular development of our institutions, is that being a democrat? To me, progress is fraternity re-established between the members of the great French family. We cannot conceal from ourselves that many sufferings – ”

At three o’clock Simon Giguët was still explaining Progress, accompanied by the rhythmic snores of various electors which denoted a sound sleep. The malicious Achille Pigoult had urged all present to listen religiously to the young orator, who was now floundering in his phrases and paraphrases hopelessly at random.

V. THE PERPLEXITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT IN ARCIS

At this moment several groups of bourgeois, electors and non-electors, were standing before the Chateau d'Arcis, the iron gates of which open on the square near to the door of Madame Marion's house. This square is a piece of open ground from which issue several roads and several streets. In it is a covered market. Opposite to the chateau, on the other side of the square, which is neither paved nor macadamized, and where the rain has made various little gutters, is a fine esplanade, called the Avenue of Sighs. Is that to the honor or to the blame of the leaders of the town? This singular ambigology is no doubt a stroke of native wit.

Two handsome side avenues, planted with lindens, lead from the square to a circular boulevard which forms another promenade, though usually deserted, where more dirt and rubbish than promenaders may commonly be seen.

At the height of the discussion which Achille Pigoult was dramatizing with a coolness and courage worthy of a member of a real parliament, four personages were walking down one of the linden avenues which led from the Avenue of Sighs. When they reached the square, they stopped as if by common consent, and looked at the inhabitants of Arcis, who were humming before the chateau like so many bees before returning to their hives at night. The four promenaders were the whole ministerial conclave of Arcis, namely: the sub-prefect, the *procureur-du-roi*, his substitute, and the examining-judge, Monsieur Martener. The judge of the court, Monsieur Michu, was, as we know already, a partisan of the Elder Branch and a devoted adherent of the house of Cinq-Cygne.

"No, I don't understand the action of the government," repeated the sub-prefect, Antonin Goulard, pointing to the groups which seemed to be thickening. "At such an important crisis to leave me without instructions!"

"In that you are like the rest of us," said Olivier Vinet, the substitute, smiling.

"Why do you blame the government?" asked the *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest.

"The ministry is much embarrassed," remarked young Martener. "It knows that this arrondissement belongs, in a certain way, to the Kellers, and it is very desirous not to thwart them. It is forced to keep on good terms with the only man who is comparable to Monsieur de Talleyrand. It is not to the prefect, but to the Comte de Gondreville that you ought to send the commissary of police."

"Meanwhile," said Frederic Marest, "the Opposition is bestirring itself; you see yourselves the influence of Monsieur Giguet. Our mayor, Monsieur Beauvisage, is presiding over that preparatory meeting."

"After all," said Olivier Vinet slyly to the sub-prefect, "Simon Giguet is your friend and schoolmate; he will belong to the Thiers' party; you risk nothing in supporting his election."

"The present ministry could dismiss me before its fall," replied the sub-prefect, "and who knows when I should be reappointed?"

"Collinet, the grocer! – that makes the sixty-sixth elector who has entered the Giguet house," said Monsieur Martener, who was practising his trade as examining-judge by counting the electors.

"If Charles Keller is the ministerial candidate," resumed the sub-prefect, "I ought to have been told of it; the government makes a mistake in giving time for Simon Giguet to get hold of the electors."

These four individuals had now reached, walking slowly, the spot where the avenue ceases and becomes an open square.

"There's Monsieur Groslier," said the judge, catching sight of a man on horseback.

This was the commissary of police; he saw the government of Arcis collected on the public square, and he rode up to the four gentlemen.

"Well, Monsieur Groslier?" said the sub-prefect, taking the commissary a little apart from his three colleagues.

“Monsieur,” said the commissary of police in a low voice, “Monsieur la prefet has sent me to tell you some sad news; Monsieur le Vicomte Charles Keller is dead. The news reached Paris by telegram night before last, and the two Messieurs Keller, the Comte de Gondreville, the Marechale Carigliano, in fact the whole family are now at Gondreville. Abd-el-Kader has resumed the offensive in Africa; the war is being vigorously carried on. This poor young man was among the first victims of the renewal of hostilities. You will receive confidential instructions, so Monsieur le prefet told me, in relation to the coming election.”

“By whom?” asked the sub-prefect.

“If I knew that, the matter would not be confidential,” replied the commissary. “In fact, I think the prefet himself does not know. He told me that the matter would be a secret one between you and the ministry.”

Then he rode on, after seeing the sub-prefect lay his fingers on his lips as a warning to keep silence.

“Well, what news from the prefecture?” said the *procureur-du-roi*, when Goulard returned to the group of the three functionaries.

“Nothing satisfactory,” replied Goulard, stepping quickly, as if he wanted to get away from the others, who now walked silently toward the middle of the square, somewhat piqued by the manner of the sub-prefect. There Monsieur Martener noticed old Madame Beauvisage, the mother of Phileas, surrounded by nearly all the bourgeois on the square, to whom she was apparently relating something. A solicitor, named Sinot, who numbered all the royalists of Arcis among his clients, and who had not gone to the Giguet meeting, now detached himself from the group, and running to the door of the Marion house rang the bell violently.

“What can be the matter?” said Frederic Marest, dropping his eyeglass, and calling the attention of his colleagues to this circumstance.

“The matter is, messieurs,” said the sub-prefect, thinking it useless to keep a secret which was evidently known to the other party, “that Charles Keller has been killed in Africa, and that this event doubles the chances of Simon Giguet. You know Arcis; there can be no other ministerial candidate than Charles Keller. Any other man would find the whole local patriotism of the place arrayed against him.

“Will they really elect such an idiot as Simon Giguet?” said Olivier Vinet, laughing.

This young substitute, then only twenty-three years of age, was the son of one of our most famous attorney-generals, who had come into power with the Revolution of July; he therefore owed his early entrance into public life to the influence of his father. The latter, always elected deputy by the town of Provins, is one of the buttresses of the Centre in the Chamber. Therefore the son, whose mother was a Demoiselle de Chargeboeuf [see “Pierrette”], had a certain air of assurance, both in his functions and in his personal behavior, that plainly showed the backing of his father. He expressed his opinion on men and things without reserve; for he confidently expected not to stay very long at Arcis, but to receive his appointment as *procureur-du-roi* at Versailles, a sure step to a post in Paris.

The confident air of this little Vinet, and the sort of assumption which the certainty of making his way gave to him, was all the more irritating to Frederic Marest, his superior, because a biting wit accompanied the rather undisciplined habits and manners of his young subordinate. Frederic Marest, *procureur-du-roi*, a man about forty years of age, who had spent six years of his life under the Restoration in becoming a substitute only to be neglected and left in Arcis by the government of July, in spite of the fact that he had some eighteen thousand francs a year of his own, was perpetually kept on the rack between the necessity of winning the good graces of young Vinet’s father – a touchy attorney-general who might become Keeper of the Seals – and of keeping his own dignity.

Olivier Vinet, slender in figure, with a pallid face, lighted by a pair of malicious green eyes, was one of those sarcastic young gentlemen, inclined to dissipation, who nevertheless know how to assume the pompous, haughty, and pedantic air with which magistrates arm themselves when they

once reach the bench. The tall, stout, heavy, and grave *procureur-du-roi* had lately invented a system by which he hoped to keep out of trouble with the exasperating Olivier; he treated him as a father would treat a spoilt child.

“Olivier,” he replied to his substitute, slapping him on the shoulder, “a man of your capacity ought to reflect that Maitre Giguet is very likely to become deputy. You’d have made that remark just as readily before the people of Arcis as before us, who are safe friends.”

“There is one thing against Giguet,” observed Monsieur Martener.

This good young man, rather heavy but full of capacity, the son of a physician in Provins, owed his place to Vinet’s father, who was long a lawyer in Provins and still continued to be the patron of his people as the Comte de Gondreville was the patron of the people of Arcis.

“What is that?” asked the sub-prefect.

“Local patriotism is always bitterly against a man who is imposed upon the electors,” replied the examining-judge, “but when it happens that the good people of Arcis have to elevate one of their own equals to the Chamber, envy and jealousy are stronger than patriotism.”

“That is very simple,” said the *procureur-du-roi*, “and very true. If you can manage to collect fifty ministerial votes you will find yourself master of the coming election,” he added, addressing the sub-prefect.

“It will do if you produce a candidate of the same calibre as Simon Giguet,” said Olivier Vinet.

The sub-prefect allowed an expression of satisfaction to appear upon his features, which did not escape the notice of his three companions, with whom, moreover, he had a full understanding. All four being bachelors, and tolerably rich, they had formed, without premeditation, an alliance against the dulness of the provinces. The three functionaries had already remarked the sort of jealousy that Goulard felt for Giguet, which a few words on their antecedents will explain.

Antonin Goulard, the son of a former huntsman to the house of Simeuse, enriched by the purchase of the confiscated property of *emigres* was, like Simon Giguet, a son of Arcis. Old Goulard, his father, left the abbey of Valpreux (corruption of Val-des-Preux) to live in Arcis after the death of his wife, and he sent his son to the imperial lyceum, where Colonel Giguet had already placed his son Simon. The two schoolmates subsequently went through their legal studies in Paris together, and their intimacy was continued in the amusements of youth. They promised to help each other to success in life whenever they entered upon their different careers. But fate willed that they should end by being rivals.

In spite of Goulard’s manifest advantages, in spite of the cross of the Legion of honor which the Comte de Gondreville had obtained for him in default of promotion, the offer of his heart and position had been frankly declined when, about six months before this history begins, he had privately presented himself to Madame Beauvisage as a suitor for her daughter’s hand. No step of that nature is ever taken secretly in the provinces. The *procureur-du-roi*, Frederic Marest, whose fortune, buttonhole, and position were about on a par with those of Antonin Goulard, had received a like refusal, three years earlier, based on the difference of ages. Consequently, the two officials were on terms of strict politeness with the Beauvisage family, and laughed at them severally in private. Both had divined and communicated to each other the real motive of the candidacy of Simon Giguet, for they fully understood the hopes of Madame Marion; and they were bent on preventing her nephew from marrying the heiress whose hand had been refused to them.

“God grant that I may be master of this election,” said Goulard, “and that the Comte de Gondreville may get me made a prefect, for I have no more desire than you to spend the rest of my days here, though I was born in Arcis.”

“You have a fine opportunity to be elected deputy yourself, my chief,” said Olivier Vinet to Marest. “Come and see my father, who will, I think, arrive here from Provins in a few hours. Let us propose to him to have you chosen as ministerial candidate.”

“Halt!” said Antonin; “the ministry has its own views about the deputy of Arcis.”

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed Vinet, “there are two ministries: the one that thinks it makes elections, and another that thinks it profits by them.”

“Don’t let us complicate Antonin’s difficulties,” said Frederic Marest, winking at his substitute.

The four officials, who had crossed the open square and were close to the Mulet inn, now saw Poupart leaving the house of Madame Marion and coming towards them. A moment later, and the *porte cochere* of that house vomited the sixty-seven conspirators.

“So you went to that meeting?” said Antonin Goulard to Poupart.

“I shall never go again, monsieur le sous-prefet,” said the innkeeper. “The son of Monsieur Keller is dead, and I have now no object in going there. God has taken upon himself to clear the ground.”

“Well, Pigoult, what happened?” cried Olivier Vinet, catching sight of the young notary.

“Oh!” said Pigoult, on whose forehead the perspiration, which had not dried, bore testimony to his efforts, “Simon has just told some news that made them all unanimous. Except five persons, – Poupart, my grandfather, Mollot, Sinot, and I, – all present swore, as at the *Jeu de Paume*, to employ every means to promote the triumph of Simon Giguët, of whom I have made a mortal enemy. Oh! we got warm, I can tell you! However, I led the Giguëts to fulminate against the Gondrevilles. That puts the old count on my side. No later than to-morrow he will hear what the *soi-disant* patriots of Arcis have said about him and his corruptions and his infamies, to free their necks, as they called it, of his yoke.”

“Unanimous, were they?” said Olivier Vinet, laughing.

“Unanimous, *to-day*,” remarked Monsieur Martener.

“Oh!” exclaimed Pigoult, “the general sentiment of the electors is for one of their own townsmen. Whom can you oppose to Simon Giguët, – a man who has just spent two hours in explaining the word *progress*.”

“Take old Grevin!” cried the sub-prefect.

“He has no such ambition,” replied Pigoult. “But we must first of all consult the Comte de Gondreville. Look, look!” he added; “see the attentions with which Simon is taking him that gilded booby, Beauvisage.”

And he pointed to the candidate, who was holding the mayor by the arm and whispering in his ear. Beauvisage meantime was bowing right and left to the inhabitants, who gazed at him with the deference which provincials always testify to the richest man in their locality.

“But there’s no use cajoling *him*,” continued Pigoult. “Cecile’s hand does not depend on either her father or her mother.”

“On whom, then?”

“On my old patron, Monsieur Grevin. Even if Simon is elected deputy, the town is not won.”

Though the sub-prefect and Frederic Marest tried to get an explanation of these words, Pigoult refused to give the reason of an exclamation which seemed to them big with meaning and implying a certain knowledge of the plans of the Beauvisage family.

All Arcis was now in a commotion, not only on account of the fatal event which had just overtaken the Gondreville family, but because of the great resolution come to at the Giguët house, where Madame Marion and her three servants were hurriedly engaged in putting everything in its usual order, ready to receive her customary guests, whose curiosity would probably bring them that evening in large numbers.

VI. THE CAMPAIGN OF 1814 FROM THE HOSIERY POINT OF VIEW

Champagne has all the appearance of a poor region, and it is a poor region. Its general aspect is sad; the land is flat. Passing through the villages, and even the towns, you will see nothing but miserable buildings of wood or half-baked clay; the best are built of brick. Stone is scarcely used at all except on public buildings. At Arcis the chateau, the law courts, and the church are the only stone buildings. Nevertheless, Champagne, or, if you prefer to say so, the departments of the Aube, Marne, and Haut-Marne, richly endowed with vineyards, the fame of which is world-wide, are otherwise full of flourishing industries.

Without speaking of the manufactures of Reims, nearly all the hosiery of France – a very considerable trade – is manufactured about Troyes. The surrounding country, over a circuit of thirty miles, is covered with workmen, whose looms can be seen through the open doors as we pass through the villages. These workmen are employed by agents, who themselves are in the service of speculators called manufacturers. The agents negotiate with the large Parisian houses, often with the retail hosiers, all of whom put out the sign, “Manufacturers of Hosiery.” None of them have ever made a pair of stockings, nor a cap, nor a sock; all their hosiery comes chiefly from Champagne, though there are a few skilled workmen in Paris who can rival the Champenois.

This intermediate agency between the producer and the consumer is an evil not confined to hosiery. It exists in almost all trades, and increases the cost of merchandise by the amount of the profit exacted by the middlemen. To break down these costly partitions, that injure the sale of products, would be a magnificent enterprise, which, in its results, would attain to the height of statesmanship. In fact, industry of all kinds would gain by establishing within our borders the cheapness so essential to enable us to carry on victoriously the industrial warfare with foreign countries, – a struggle as deadly as that of arms.

But the destruction of an abuse of this kind would not return to modern philanthropists the glory and the advantages of a crusade against the empty nutshells of the penitentiary and negrophobia; consequently, the interloping profits of these *bankers of merchandise* will continue to weigh heavily both on producers and consumers. In France – keen-witted land! – it is thought that to simplify is to destroy. The Revolution of 1789 is still a terror.

We see, by the industrial energy displayed in a land where Nature is a godmother, what progress agriculture might make if capital would go into partnership with the soil, which is not so thankless in Champagne as it is in Scotland, where capital has done wonders. The day when agriculture will have conquered the unfertile portion of those departments, and industry has seconded capital on the Champagne chalk, the prosperity of that region will triple itself. Into that land, now without luxury, where homes are barren, English comfort will penetrate, money will obtain that rapid circulation which is the half of wealth, and is already beginning in several of the inert portions of our country. Writers, administrators, the Church from its pulpit, the Press in its columns, all to whom chance has given power to influence the masses, should say and resay this truth, – to hoard is a social crime. The deliberate hoarding of a province arrests industrial life, and injures the health of a nation.

Thus the little town of Arcis, without much means of transition, doomed apparently to the most complete immobility, is, relatively, a rich town abounding in capital slowly amassed by its trade in hosiery.

Monsieur Phileas Beauvisage was the Alexander, or, if you will, the Attila of this business. And here follow the means by which this honorable merchant had acquired his supremacy over cotton.

The last remaining child of farmers named Beauvisage, tenants of the splendid farm of Bellache, a dependency of the Gondreville estate, his parents made, in 1811, a great sacrifice in order to buy a substitute and save their only child from conscription. After that, in 1813, the mother

Beauvisage, having become a widow, saved her son once more from enrolment in the Gardes, thanks to the influence of the Comte de Gondreville. Phileas, who was then twenty-one years of age, had been devoted for the last three years to the peaceable trade of hosiery.

Coming to the end of the lease of Bellache, old Madame Beauvisage declined to renew it. She saw she had enough to do in her old age in taking care of her property. That nothing might give her uneasiness of mind, she proceeded, by the help of Monsieur Grevin, the notary of Arcis, to liquidate her husband's estate, although her son made no request whatever for a settlement. The result proved that she owed him the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand francs. The good woman did not sell her landed property, most of which came from the unfortunate Michu, the former bailiff of the Simeuse family; she paid the sum to Phileas in ready money, – advising him to buy out the business of his employer, Monsieur Pigoult, the son of the old justice of the peace, whose affairs were in so bad a way that his death, as we have said, was thought to be voluntary.

Phileas Beauvisage, a virtuous youth, having a deep respect for his mother, concluded the purchase from his patron, and as he had the bump of what phrenologists term “acquisitiveness,” his youthful ardor spent itself upon this business, which he thought magnificent and desired to increase by speculation.

The name of Phileas, which may seem peculiar, is only one of the many oddities which we owe to the Revolution. Attached to the Simeuse family, and consequently, good Catholics, the Beauvisage father and mother desired to have their son baptized. The rector of Cinq-Cygne, the Abbe Goujet, whom they consulted, advised them to give their son for patron a saint whose Greek name might signify the municipality, – for the child was born at a period when children were inscribed on the civil registers under the fantastic names of the Republican calendar.

In 1814, hosiery, a stable business with few risks in ordinary times, was subject to all the variations in the price of cotton. This price depended at that time on the triumph or the defeat of the Emperor Napoleon, whose adversaries, the English generals, used to say in Spain: “The town is taken; now get out your bales.”

Pigoult, former patron of young Phileas, furnished the raw material to his workmen, who were scattered all over the country. At the time when he sold the business to Beauvisage junior, he possessed a large amount of raw cotton bought at a high price, whereas Lisbon was sending enormous quantities into the Empire at six sous the kilogramme, in virtue of the Emperor's celebrated decree. The reaction produced in France by the introduction of the Portuguese cotton caused the death of Pigoult, Achille's father, and began the fortune of Phileas, who, far from losing his head like his master, made his prices moderate by buying cotton cheaply and in doubling the quantity ventured upon by his predecessor. This simple system enabled Phileas to triple the manufacture and to pose as the benefactor of the workingmen; so that he was able to disperse his hosiery in Paris and all over France at a profit, when the luckiest of his competitors were only able to sell their goods at cost price.

At the beginning of 1814, Phileas had emptied his warerooms. The prospect of a war on French soil, the hardships of which were likely to press chiefly on Champagne, made him cautious. He manufactured nothing, and held himself ready to meet all events with his capital turned into gold. At this period the custom-house lines were no longer maintained. Napoleon could not do without his thirty thousand custom-house officers for service in the field. Cotton, then introduced through a thousand loopholes, slipped into the markets of France. No one can imagine how sly and how alert cotton had become at this epoch, nor with what eagerness the English laid hold of a country where cotton stockings sold for six francs a pair, and cambric shirts were objects of luxury.

Manufacturers from the second class, the principal workmen, reckoning on the genius of Napoleon, had bought up the cottons that came from Spain. They worked it up in hopes of being able later to give the law to the merchants of Paris. Phileas observed these facts. When the war ravaged Champagne, he kept himself between the French army and Paris. After each lost battle he went among the workmen who had buried their products in casks, – a sort of silo of hosiery, – then, gold

in hand, this Cossack of weaving bought up, from village to village, below the cost of fabrication, tons of merchandise which might otherwise become at any time a prey to an enemy whose feet were as much in need of being *socked* as its throat of being moistened.

Phileas displayed under these unfortunate circumstances an activity nearly equal to that of the Emperor. This general of hosiery made a commercial campaign of 1814 with splendid but ignored courage. A league or two behind where the army advanced he bought up caps and socks as the Emperor gathered immortal palms by his very reverses. The genius was equal on both sides, though exercised in different spheres; one aimed at covering heads, the other at mowing them down. Obligated to create some means of transportation in order to save his tons of hosiery, which he stored in a suburb of Paris, Phileas often put in requisition horses and army-waggons, as if the safety of the empire were concerned. But the majesty of commerce was surely as precious as that of Napoleon. The English merchants, in buying out the European markets, certainly got the better of the colossus who threatened their trade.

By the time the Emperor abdicated at Fontainebleau, Phileas, triumphant, was master of the situation. He maintained, by clever manoeuvring, the depreciation in cottons, and doubled his fortune at the moment when his luckiest competitors were getting rid of their merchandise at a loss of fifty per cent. He returned to Arcis with a fortune of three hundred thousand francs, half of which, invested on the Grand-Livre at sixty, returned him an income of fifteen thousand francs a year. He employed the remainder in building, furnishing, and adorning a handsome house on the Place du Pont in Arcis.

On the return of the successful hosier, Monsieur Grevin was naturally his confidant. The notary had an only daughter to marry, then twenty years of age. Grevin, a widower, knew the fortune of Madame Beauvisage, the mother, and he believed in the energy and capacity of a young man bold enough to have turned the campaign of 1814 to his profit. Severine Grevin had her mother's fortune of sixty thousand francs for her dower. Grevin was then over fifty; he feared to die, and saw no chance of marrying his daughter as he wished under the Restoration – for her, he had had ambition. Under these circumstances he was shrewd enough to make Phileas ask her in marriage.

Severine Grevin, a well-trained young lady and handsome, was considered at that time the best match in Arcis. In fact, an alliance with the intimate friend of the senator Comte de Gondreville, peer of France, was certainly a great honor for the son of a Gondreville tenant-farmer. The widow Beauvisage, his mother, would have made any sacrifice to obtain it; but on learning the success of her son, she dispensed with the duty of giving him a *dot*, – a wise economy which was imitated by the notary.

Thus was consummated the union of the son of a farmer formerly so faithful to the Simeuse family with the daughter of its most cruel enemy. It was, perhaps, the only application made of the famous saying of Louis XVIII.: “Union and Oblivion.”

On the second return of the Bourbons, Grevin's father-in-law, old Doctor Varlet, died at the age of seventy-six, leaving two hundred thousand francs in gold in his cellar, besides other property valued at an equal sum. Thus Phileas and his wife had, outside of their business, an assured income of thirty thousand francs a year.

The first two years of this marriage sufficed to show Madame Severine and her father, Monsieur Grevin the absolute silliness of Phileas Beauvisage. His one gleam of commercial rapacity had seemed to the notary the result of superior powers; the shrewd old man had mistaken youth for strength, and luck for genius in business. Phileas certainly knew how to read and write and cipher well, but he had read nothing. Of crass ignorance, it was quite impossible to keep up even a slight conversation with him; he replied to all remarks with a deluge of commonplaces pleasantly uttered. As the son of a farmer, however, Phileas was not without a certain commercial good sense, and he was also kind and tender, and would often weep at a moving tale. It was this native goodness of heart which made him respect his wife, whose superiority had always caused him the deepest admiration.

Severine, a woman of ideas, knew all things, so Phileas believed. And she knew them the more correctly because she consulted her father on all subjects. She was gifted with great firmness, which made her the absolute mistress in her own home. As soon as the latter result was attained, the old notary felt less regret in seeing that his daughter's only domestic happiness lay in the autocracy which usually satisfies all women of her nature. But what of the woman herself? Here follows what she was said to have found in life.

VII. THE BEAUVISAGE FAMILY

During the reaction of 1815, a Vicomte de Chargeboeuf (of the poorer branch of the family) was sent to Arcis as sub-prefect through the influence of the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, to whose family he was allied. This young man remained sub-prefect for five years. The beautiful Madame Beauvisage was not, it was said, a stranger to the reasons that kept him in this office for a period far too prolonged for his own advancement. We ought to say, however, that these remarks were not justified by any of the scandals which in the provinces betray those passions that are difficult to conceal from the Argus-eyes of a little town. If Severine loved the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf and was beloved by him, it was in all honor and propriety, said the friends of the Grevins and the Marions; and that double coterie imposed its opinion on the whole arrondissement; but the Marions and the Grevins had no influence on the royalists, and the royalists regarded the sub-prefect as fortunate in love.

As soon as the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne heard what was said in the chateaux about her relation, she sent for him; and such was her horror for all who were connected, near or far, with the actors in the judicial drama so fatal to her family, that she strictly enjoined him to change his residence. Not only that, but she obtained his appointment as sub-prefect of Sancerre with the promise of advancement to the prefecture.

Some shrewd observers declared that the viscount pretended this passion for the purpose of being made prefect; for he well knew the hatred felt by the marquise for the name of Grevin. Others remarked on the coincidence of the viscount's apparitions in Paris with the visits made by Madame Beauvisage to the capital on frivolous pretexts. An impartial historian would be puzzled to form a just opinion on the facts of this matter, which are buried in the mysteries of private life. One circumstance alone seems to give color to the reports.

Cecile-Renee Beauvisage was born in 1820, just as Monsieur de Chargeboeuf left Arcis, and among his various names was that of Rene. This name was given by the Comte de Gondreville as godfather of the child. Had the mother objected to the name, she would in some degree have given color to the rumor. As gossip always endeavors to justify itself, the giving of this name was said to be a bit of maliciousness on the part of the old count. Madame Keller, the count's daughter, who was named Cecile, was the godmother. As for the resemblance shown in the person of Cecile-Renee Beauvisage, it was striking. This young girl was like neither father nor mother; in course of time she had become the living image of the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, whose aristocratic manners she had also acquired. This double resemblance, both moral and physical, was not observed by the inhabitants of Arcis, for the viscount never returned to that town.

Severine made her husband happy in his own way. He liked good living and everything easy about him; she supplied him with the choicest wines, a table worthy of a bishop, served by the best cook in the department but without the pretensions of luxury; for she kept her household strictly to the conditions of the burgher life of Arcis. It was a proverb in Arcis that you must dine with Madame Beauvisage and spend your evening with Madame Marion.

The renewed influence in the arrondissement of Arcis which the Restoration gave to the house of Cinq-Cygne had naturally drawn closer the ties that bound together the various families affected by the criminal trial relating to the abduction of Gondreville. [See "An Historical Mystery."] The Marions, Grevins, and Giguets were all the more united because the triumph of their political opinions, called "constitutional," now required the utmost harmony.

As a matter of policy Severine encouraged her husband to continue his trade in hosiery, which any other man but himself would have long renounced; and she sent him to Paris, and about the country, on business connected with it. Up to the year 1830 Phileas, who was thus enabled to exercise his bump of "acquisitiveness," earned every year a sum equivalent to his expenses. The interest on the property of Monsieur and Madame Beauvisage, being capitalized for the last fifteen years by

Grevin's intelligent care, became, by 1830, a round sum of half a million francs. That sum was, in fact, Cecile's *dot*, which the old notary then invested in the Three-per-cents at fifty, producing a safe income of thirty thousand a year.

After 1830 Beauvisage sold his business in hosiery to Jean Violette, one of his agents (grandson of one of the chief witnesses for the prosecution in the Simeuse trial), the proceeds of which amounted to three hundred thousand francs. Monsieur and Madame Beauvisage had also in prospect their double inheritance from old Grevin on one side, and the old farmer's wife Beauvisage on the other. Great provincial fortunes are usually the product of time multiplied by economy. Thirty years of old age make capital.

In giving to Cecile-Renee a *dot* of fifty thousand francs a year, her parents still reserved for themselves the two inheritances, thirty thousand a year on the Grand Livre, and their house in Arcis.

If the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne were only dead, Cecile might assuredly marry the young marquis; but the health of that great lady, who was still vigorous and almost beautiful at sixty years of age, precluded all hope of such a marriage if it even entered the minds of Grevin and his daughter, as some persons, surprised at their rejection of eligible suitors like the sub-prefect and the *procureur-du-roi*, declared that it did.

The Beauvisage residence, one of the best in Arcis, stands on the Place du Pont on a line with the rue Vide-Bourse, at the corner of the rue du Pont, which leads to the Place de l'Eglise. Though, like many provincial houses, without either court or garden, it produces a certain effect, in spite of its ornamentation in bad taste. The front door opens on the Place; the windows of the ground-floor look out on the street-side towards the post-house and inn, and command beyond the Place a rather picturesque view of the Aube, the navigation of which begins at the bridge. Beyond the bridge is another little Place or square, on which lives Monsieur Grevin, and from which the high-road to Sezanne starts.

On the street and on the square, the Beauvisage house, painted a spotless white, looks as though built of stone. The height of the windows and their external mouldings contribute to give a certain style to the house which contrasts strongly with the generally forlorn appearance of the houses of Arcis, constructed, as we have already said, of wood, and covered with plaster, imitating the solidity of stone. Still, these houses are not without a certain originality, through the fact that each architect, or each burgher, has endeavored to solve for himself the problem of styles of building.

The bridge at Arcis is of wood. About four hundred feet above the bridge the river is crossed by another bridge, on which rise the tall wooden sides of a mill with several sluices. The space between the public bridge and this private bridge forms a basin, on the banks of which are several large houses. By an opening between the roofs can be seen the height on which stands the chateau of Arcis with its park and gardens, its outer walls and trees which overhand the river above the bridges, and the rather scanty pastures of the left bank.

The sound of the water as it runs through the courses above the dam, the music of the wheels, from which the churned water falls back into the basin in sparkling cascades, animate the rue du Pont, contrasting in this respect with the tranquillity of the river flowing downward between the garden of Monsieur Grevin, whose house is at one angle of the bridge on the left bank, and the port where the boats and barges discharge their merchandise before a line of poor but picturesque houses.

Nothing can better express provincial life than the deep silence that envelops the little town and reigns in its busiest region. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how disquieting the presence of a stranger, if he only spends half a day there, may be to the inhabitants; with what attention faces protrude from the windows to observe him, and also the condition of espial in which all the residents of the little place stand to each other. Life has there become so conventional that, except on Sundays and fetedays, a stranger meets no one either on the boulevards or the Avenue of Sighs, not even, in fact, upon the streets.

It will now be readily understood why the ground-floor of the Beauvisage house is on a level with the street and square. The square serves as its courtyard. Sitting at his window the eyes of the late hosier could take in the whole of the Place de l'Eglise, the two squares of the bridge, and the road to Sezanne. He could see the coaches arriving and the travellers descending at the post-inn; and on court days he could watch the proceedings around the offices of the mayor and the justice of peace. For these reasons, Beauvisage would not have exchanged his house for the chateau, in spite of its lordly air, its stone walls, and its splendid situation.

VIII. IN WHICH THE DOT, ONE OF THE HEROINES OF THIS HISTORY, APPEARS

Entering the Beauvisage house we find a versatile, at the farther end of which rises the staircase. To right we enter a large salon with two windows opening on the square; to left is a handsome dining-room, looking on the street. The floor above is the one occupied by the family.

Notwithstanding the large fortune of the Beauvisage husband and wife, their establishment consisted of only a cook and a chamber-maid, the latter a peasant, who washed and ironed and frothed the floors rather than waited on her two mistresses, who were accustomed to spend their time in dressing and waiting upon each other. Since the sale of the business to Jean Violette, the horse and cabriolet used by Phileas, and kept at the Hotel de la Poste, had been relinquished and sold.

At the moment when Phileas reached his house after the Giguët meeting, his wife, already informed of the resolutions passed, had put on her boots and shawl and was preparing to go to her father; for she felt very sure that Madame Marion would, on that same evening, make her certain overtures relating to Simon and Cecile. After telling his wife of Charles Keller's death, Phileas asked her opinion with an artless "What do you think of that, wife?" which fully pictured his habit of deferring to Severine's opinion in all things. Then he sat down in an arm-chair and awaited her reply.

In 1839, Madame Beauvisage, then forty-four years old, was so well-preserved that she might, in that respect, rival Mademoiselle Mars. By calling to mind the most charming Celimene that the Theatre-Français ever had, an excellent idea of Severine Grevin's appearance will be obtained. The same richness of coloring, the same beauty of features, the same clearly defined outlines; but the hosier's wife was short, – a circumstance which deprived her of that noble grace, that charming coquetry *a la* Sevigne, through which the great actress commends herself to the memory of men who saw both the Empire and the Restoration.

Provincial life and the rather careless style of dress into which, for the last ten years, Severine had allowed herself to fall, gave a somewhat common air to that noble profile and those beautiful features; increasing plumpness was destroying the outlines of a figure magnificently fine during the first twelve years of her married life. But Severine redeemed these growing imperfections with a sovereign, superb, imperious glance, and a certain haughty carriage of her head. Her hair, still black and thick and long, was raised high upon her head, giving her a youthful look. Her shoulders and bosom were snowy, but they now rose puffily in a manner to obstruct the free movement of the neck, which had grown too short. Her plump and dimpled arms ended in pretty little hands that were, alas, too fat. She was, in fact, so overdone with fulness of life and health that her flesh formed a little pad, as one might call it, above her shoes. Two ear-drops, worth about three-thousand francs each, adorned her ears. She wore a lace cap with pink ribbons, a mousseline-de-laine gown in pink and gray stripes with an edging of green, opened at the bottom to show a petticoat trimmed with valenciennes lace; and a green cashmere shawl with palm-leaves, the point of which reached the ground as she walked.

"You are not so hungry," she said, casting her eyes on Beauvisage, "that you can't wait half an hour? My father has finished dinner and I couldn't eat mine in peace without knowing what he thinks and whether we ought to go to Gondreville."

"Go, go, my dear. I'll wait," said Phileas, using the "thee" and "thou."

"Good heavens!" cried Severine with a significant gesture of her shoulders. "Shall I never break you of that habit of tutoying me?"

"I never do it before company – not since 1817," said Phileas.

"You do it constantly before the servants and your daughter."

"As you will, Severine," replied Beauvisage sadly.

"Above all, don't say a word to Cecile about this resolution of the electors," added Madame Beauvisage, who was looking in the glass to arrange her shawl.

“Shall I go with you to your father’s?” asked Phileas.

“No, stay with Cecile. Besides, Jean Violette was to pay the rest of the purchase-money to-day. He has twenty thousand francs to bring you. This is the third time he has put us off three months; don’t grant him any more delays; if he can’t pay now, give his note to Courtet, the sheriff, and take the law of him. Achille Pigoult will tell you how to proceed. That Violette is the worthy son of his grandfather; I think he is capable of enriching himself by going into bankruptcy, – there’s neither law nor gospel in him.”

“He is very intelligent,” said Beauvisage.

“You have given him the good-will of a fine business for thirty thousand francs, which is certainly worth fifty thousand; and in ten years he has only paid you ten thousand – ”

“I never sued anybody yet,” replied Beauvisage, “and I’d rather lose my money than torment a poor man – ”

“A man who laughs at you!”

Beauvisage was silent; feeling unable to reply to that cruel remark, he looked at the boards which formed the floor of the salon.

Perhaps the progressive abolition of mind and will in Beauvisage will be explained by the abuse of sleep. Going to bed every night at eight o’clock and getting up the next morning at eight, he had slept his twelve hours nightly for the last twenty years, never waking; or if that extraordinary event did occur, it was so serious a matter to his mind that he talked of it all day. He spent an hour at his toilet, for his wife had trained him not to appear in her presence at breakfast unless properly shaved, cleaned, and dressed for the day. When he was in business, he departed to his office after breakfast and returned only in time for dinner. Since 1832, he had substituted for his business occupations a daily visit to his father-in-law, a promenade about the town, or visits to his friends.

In all weather he wore boots, blue coat and trousers, and a white waistcoat, – the style of dress exacted by his wife. His linen was remarkable for its fineness and purity, owing to the fact that Severine obliged him to change it daily. Such care for his person, seldom taken in the provinces, contributed to make him considered in Arcis very much as a man of elegance is considered in Paris. Externally this worthy seller of cotton hose seemed to be a personage; for his wife had sense enough never to utter a word which could put the public of Arcis on the scent of her disappointment and the utter nullity of her husband, who, thanks to his smiles, his handsome dress, and his manners, passed for a man of importance. People said that Severine was so jealous of him that she prevented him from going out in the evening, while in point of fact Phileas was bathing the roses and lilies of his skin in happy slumber.

Beauvisage, who lived according to his tastes, pampered by his wife, well served by his two servants, cajoled by his daughter, called himself the happiest man in Arcis, and really was so. The feeling of Severine for this nullity of a man never went beyond the protecting pity of a mother for her child. She disguised the harshness of the words she was frequently obliged to say to him by a joking manner. No household was ever more tranquil; and the aversion Phileas felt for society, where he went to sleep, and where he could not play cards (being incapable of learning a game), had made Severine sole mistress of her evenings.

Cecile’s entrance now put an end to her father’s embarrassment, and he cried out heartily: —

“Hey! how fine we are!”

Madame Beauvisage turned round abruptly and cast a look upon her daughter which made the girl blush.

“Cecile, who told you to dress yourself in that way?” she demanded.

“Are we not going to-night to Madame Marion’s? I dressed myself now to see if my new gown fitted me.”

“Cecile! Cecile!” exclaimed Severine, “why do you try to deceive your mother? It is not right; and I am not pleased with you – you are hiding something from me.”

“What has she done?” asked Beauvisage, delighted to see his daughter so prettily dressed.

“What has she done? I shall tell her,” said Madame Beauvisage, shaking her finger at her only child.

Cecile flung herself on her mother’s neck, kissing and coaxing her, which is a means by which only daughters get their own way.

Cecile Beauvisage, a girl of nineteen, had put on a gown of gray silk trimmed with gimp and tassels of a deeper shade of gray, making the front of the gown look like a pelisse. The corsage, ornamented with buttons and caps to the sleeves, ended in a point in front, and was laced up behind like a corset. This species of corset defined the back, the hips, and the bust perfectly. The skirt, trimmed with three rows of fringe, fell in charming folds, showing by its cut and its make the hand of a Parisian dressmaker. A pretty fichu edged with lace covered her shoulders; around her throat was a pink silk neckerchief, charmingly tied, and on her head was a straw hat ornamented with one moss rose. Her hands were covered with black silk mittens, and her feet were in bronze kid boots. This gala air, which gave her somewhat the appearance of the pictures in a fashion-book, delighted her father.

Cecile was well made, of medium height, and perfectly well-proportioned. She had braided her chestnut hair, according to the fashion of 1839, in two thick plaits which followed the line of the face and were fastened by their ends to the back of her head. Her face, a fine oval, and beaming with health, was remarkable for an aristocratic air which she certainly did not derive from either her father or her mother. Her eyes, of a light brown, were totally devoid of that gentle, calm, and almost timid expression natural to the eyes of young girls. Lively, animated, and always well in health, Cecile spoiled, by a sort of bourgeois matter-of-factness, and the manners of a petted child, all that her person presented of romantic charm. Still, a husband capable of reforming her education and effacing the traces of provincial life, might still evolve from that living block a charming woman of the world.

Madame Beauvisage had had the courage to bring up her daughter to good principles; she had made herself employ a false severity which enabled her to compel obedience and repress the little evil that existed in the girl’s soul. Mother and daughter had never been parted; thus Cecile had, what is more rare in young girls than is generally supposed, a purity of thought, a freshness of heart, and a naivete of nature, real, complete, and flawless.

“Your dress is enough to make me reflect,” said Madame Beauvisage. “Did Simon Giguet say anything to you yesterday that you are hiding from me?”

“Dear mamma,” said Cecile in her mother’s ear, “he bores me; but there is no one else for me in Arcis.”

“You judge him rightly; but wait till your grandfather has given an opinion,” said Madame Beauvisage, kissing her daughter, whose reply proved her good-sense, though it also revealed the breach made in her innocence by the idea of marriage.

Severine was devoted to her father; she and her daughter allowed no one but themselves to take charge of his linen; they knitted his socks for him, and gave the most minute care to his comfort. Grevin knew that no thought of self-interest had entered their affection; the million they would probably inherit could not dry their tears at his death; old men are very sensible to disinterested tenderness. Every morning before going to see him, Madame Beauvisage and Cecile attended to his dinner for the next day, sending him the best that the market afforded.

Madame Beauvisage had always desired that her father would present her at the Chateau de Gondreville and connect her with the count’s daughters; but the wise old man explained, again and again, how difficult it would be to have permanent relations with the Duchesse de Carigliano, who lived in Paris and seldom came to Gondreville, or with the brilliant Madame Keller, after doing a business in hosiery.

“Your life is lived,” he said to his daughter; “find all your enjoyments henceforth in Cecile, who will certainly be rich enough to give you an existence as broad and high as you deserve. Choose a son-in-law with ambition and means, and you can follow her to Paris and leave that jackass Beauvisage

behind you. If I live long enough to see Cecile's husband I'll pilot you all on the sea of political interests, as I once piloted others, and you will reach a position equal to that of the Kellers."

These few words were said before the revolution of July, 1830. Grevin desired to live that he might get under way the future grandeur of his daughter, his grand-daughter, and his great-grandchildren. His ambition extended to the third generation.

When he talked thus, the old man's idea was to marry Cecile to Charles Keller; he was now grieving over that lost hope, uncertain where to look in the future. Having no relations with Parisian society, and seeing in the department of the Aube no other husband for Cecile than the youthful Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, he was asking himself whether by the power of gold he could surmount the animosities which the revolution of July had roused between the royalists who were faithful to their principles, and their conquerors. The happiness of his grand-daughter seemed to him so doubtful if he delivered her into the hands of the proud and haughty Marquise de Cinq-Cygne that he decided in his own mind to trust to the friend of old age, Time. He hoped that his bitter enemy the marquise might die, and, in that case, he thought he could win the son through his grandfather, old d'Hauteserre, who was then living at Cinq-Cygne and whom he knew to be accessible to the persuasions of money.

If this plan failed, and Cecile Beauvisage remained unmarried, he resolved as a last resort to consult his friend Gondreville, who would, he believed, find his Cecile a husband, after his heart and his ambition, among the dukes of the Empire.

IX. A STRANGER

Severine found her father seated on a wooden bench at the end of his terrace, under a bower of lilacs then in bloom, and taking his coffee; for it was half-past five in the afternoon. She saw, by the pain on her father's face, that he had already heard the news. In fact, the old count had sent a valet to his friend, begging him to come to him.

Up to the present time, old Grevin had endeavored not to encourage his daughter's ambition too far; but now, in the midst of the contradictory reflections which the melancholy death of Charles Keller caused him, his secret escaped his lips.

"My dear child," he said to her, "I had formed the finest plans for your future. Cecile was to have been Vicomtesse Keller, for Charles, by my influence, would now have been selected deputy. Neither Gondreville nor his daughter Madame Keller would have refused Cecile's *dot* of sixty thousand francs a year, especially with the prospect of a hundred thousand more which she will some day have from you. You would have lived in Paris with your daughter, and played your part of mother-in-law in the upper regions of power."

Madame Beauvisage made a sign of satisfaction.

"But we are knocked down by the death of this charming young man, to whom the prince royal had already given his friendship. Now this Simon Giguët, who has thrust himself upon the scene, is a fool, and the worst of all fools, for he thinks himself an eagle. You are, however, too intimate with the Giguëts and the Marion household not to put the utmost politeness into your refusal – but you must refuse him."

"As usual, you and I are of the same opinion, father."

"You can say that I have otherwise disposed of Cecile's hand, and that will cut short all preposterous pretensions like that of Antonin Goulard. Little Vinet may offer himself, and he is preferable to the others who are smelling after the *dot*; he has talent, and shrewdness, and he belongs to the Chargeboeufs by his mother; but he has too much character not to rule his wife, and he is young enough to make himself loved. You would perish between two sentiments – for I know you by heart, my child."

"I shall be much embarrassed this evening at the Marions' to know what to say," remarked Severine.

"Well, then, my dear," said her father, "send Madame Marion to me; I'll talk to her."

"I knew, father, that you were thinking of our future, but I had no idea you expected it to be so brilliant," said Madame Beauvisage, taking the hands of the old man and kissing them.

"I have pondered the matter so deeply," said Grevin, "that in 1831 I bought the Beauseant mansion in Paris, which you have probably seen."

Madame de Beauvisage made a movement of surprise on hearing this secret, until then so carefully kept, but she did not interrupt her father.

"It will be my wedding present," he went on. "In 1832 I let it for seven years to an Englishman for twenty-four thousand francs a year, – a pretty stroke of business; for it only cost me three hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, of which I thus recover nearly two hundred thousand. The lease ends in July of this year."

Severine kissed her father on the forehead and on both cheeks. This last revelation so magnified her future that she was well-nigh dazzled.

"I shall advise my father," she said to herself, as she recrossed the bridge, "to give only the reversion of that property to his grandchildren, and let me have the life-interest in it. I have no idea of letting my daughter and son-in-law turn me out of doors; they must live with me."

At dessert, when the two women-servants were safely at their own dinner in the kitchen, and Madame Beauvisage was certain of not being overheard, she thought it advisable to give Cecile a little lecture.

“My daughter,” she said, “behave this evening with propriety, like a well-bred girl; and from this day forth be more sedate. Do not chatter heedlessly, and never walk alone with Monsieur Giguët, or Monsieur Olivier Vinet, or the sub-prefect, or Monsieur Martener, – in fact, with any one, not even Achille Pigoult. You will not marry any of the young men of Arcis, or of the department. Your fate is to shine in Paris. Therefore I shall now give you charming dresses, to accustom you to elegance. We can easily find out where the Princesse de Cadignan and the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne get their things. I mean that you shall cease to look provincial. You must practise the piano for three hours every day. I shall send for Monsieur Moïse from Troyes until I know what master I ought to get from Paris. Your talents must all be developed, for you have only one year more of girlhood before you. Now I have warned you, and I shall see how you behave this evening. You must manage to keep Simon at a distance, but without coquetting with him.”

“Don’t be uneasy, mamma; I intend to adore the *stranger*.”

These words, which made Madame Beauvisage laugh, need some explanation.

“Ha! I haven’t seen him yet,” said Phileas, “but everybody is talking about him. When I want to know who he is, I shall send the corporal or Monsieur Groslier to ask him for his passport.”

There is no little town in France where, at a given time, the drama or the comedy of the *stranger* is not played. Often the stranger is an adventurer who makes dupes and departs, carrying with him the reputation of a woman, or the money of a family. Oftener the stranger is a real stranger, whose life remains mysterious long enough for the town to busy itself curiously about his words and deeds.

Now the probable accession to power of Simon Giguët was not the only serious event that was happening in Arcis. For the last two days the attention of the little town had been focussed on a personage just arrived, who proved to be the first Unknown of the present generation. The *stranger* was at this moment the subject of conversation in every household in the place. He was the beam fallen from heaven into the city of the frogs.

The situation of Arcis-sur-Aube explains the effect which the arrival of a stranger was certain to produce. About eighteen miles from Troyes, on the high-road to Paris, opposite to a farm called “La Belle Etoile,” a county road branches off from the main road, and leads to Arcis, crossing the vast plains where the Seine cuts a narrow green valley bordered with poplars, which stand out upon the whiteness of the chalk soil of Champagne. The main road from Arcis to Troyes is eighteen miles in length, and makes the arch of a bow, the extremities of which are Troyes and Arcis, so that the shortest route from Paris to Arcis is by the county road which turns off, as we have said, near the Belle Etoile. The Aube is navigable only from Arcis to its mouth. Therefore this town, standing eighteen miles from a high-road, and separated from Troyes by monotonous plains, is isolated more or less, and has but little commerce or transportation either by land or water. Arcis is, in fact, a town completely isolated, where no travellers pass, and is attached to Troyes and La Belle Etoile by stage-coaches only. All the inhabitants know each other; they even know the commercial travellers who come, now and then, on business from the large Parisian houses. Thus, as in all provincial towns in a like position, a stranger, if he stayed two days, would wag the tongues and excite the imaginations of the whole community without his name or his business being known.

Now, Arcis being still in a state of tranquillity three days before the morning when, by the will of the creator of so many histories, the present tale begins, there was seen to arrive by the county road a stranger, driving a handsome tilbury drawn by a valuable horse, and accompanied by a tiny groom, no bigger than my fist, mounted on a saddle-horse. The coach, connecting with the diligences to Troyes, had brought from La Belle Etoile three trunks coming from Paris, marked with no name, but belonging to this stranger, who took up his quarters at the Mulet inn. Every one in Arcis supposed, on the first evening, that this personage had come with the intention of buying the estate of Arcis;

and much was said in all households about the future owner of the chateau. The tilbury, the traveller, his horses, his servant, one and all appeared to belong to a man who had dropped upon Arcis from the highest social sphere.

The stranger, no doubt fatigued, did not show himself for a time; perhaps he spent part of the day in arranging himself in the rooms he had chosen, announcing his intention of staying a certain time. He requested to see the stable where his horses were to be kept, showed himself very exacting, and insisted that they should be placed in stalls apart from those of the innkeeper's horses, and from those of guests who might come later. In consequence of such singular demands, the landlord of the hotel du Mulet considered his guest to be an Englishman.

On the evening of the first day several attempts were made at the Mulet by inquisitive persons to satisfy their curiosity; but no light whatever could be obtained from the little groom, who evaded all inquiries, not by refusals or by silence, but by sarcasms which seemed to be beyond his years and to prove him a corrupt little mortal.

After making a careful toilet and dining at six o'clock, the stranger mounted a horse, and, followed by his groom, rode off along the road to Brienne, not returning till a very late hour to the Mulet. The landlord, his wife, and her maids had meantime gained no information from a careful examination of his trunks, and the articles about his rooms, as to the projects or the condition of their mysterious inmate.

On the stranger's return the mistress of the house carried up to him the book in which, according to police regulations, he was required to inscribe his name, rank, the object of his journey, and the place from which he came.

"I shall write nothing," he said to the mistress of the inn. "If any one questions you, you can say I refused; and you may send the sub-prefect to see me, for I have no passport. I dare say that many persons will make inquiries about me, madame, and you can tell them just what you like. I wish you to know nothing about me. If you worry me on this point, I shall go to the Hotel de la Poste on the Place du Pont and remain there for the fortnight I propose to spend here. I should be sorry for that, because I know that you are the sister of Gothard, one of the heroes of the Simeuse affair."

"Enough, monsieur," said the sister of the steward of Cinq-Cygne.

After such a beginning, the stranger kept the mistress of the house a whole hour and made her tell him all she knew of Arcis, of its fortunes, its interests, and its functionaries. The next day he disappeared on horseback, followed by his tiger, returning at midnight.

We can now understand Mademoiselle Cecile's little joke, which Madame Beauvisage thought to be without foundation. Beauvisage and Cecile, surprised by the order of the day promulgated by Severine, were enchanted. While his wife went to dress for Madame Marion's reception, the father listened to the many conjectures it was natural a girl should make in such a case. Then, fatigued with his day, he went to bed as soon as his wife and daughter had departed.

As may readily be supposed by those who know anything of country towns, a crowd of persons flocked to Madame Marion's that evening. The triumph of Giguet junior was thought to be a victory won against the Comte de Gondreville, and to insure forever the independence of Arcis in the matter of elections. The news of the death of poor Charles Keller was regarded as a judgment from heaven, intended to silence all rivalries.

Antonin Goulard, Frederic Marest, Olivier Vinet, and Monsieur Martener, the authorities who, until then, had frequented this salon (the prevailing opinions of which did not seem to them contrary to the government created by the popular will in July, 1830), came as usual, possessed by curiosity to see what attitude the Beauvisage family would take under the circumstances.

The salon, restored to its usual condition, showed no signs of the meeting which appeared to have settled the destiny of Simon Giguet. By eight o'clock four card-tables, each with four players, were under way. The smaller salon and the dining-room were full of people. Never, except on grand

occasions, such as balls and fete-days, had Madame Marion seen such an influx at the door of her salon, forming as it were the tail of a comet.

“It is the dawn of power,” said Olivier Vinet to the mistress of the house, showing her this spectacle, so gratifying to the heart of a person who delighted in receiving company.

“No one knows what there is in Simon,” replied the mother. “We live in times when young men who persevere and are moral and upright can aspire to everything.”

This answer was made, not so much to Vinet as to Madame Beauvisage, who had entered the room with her daughter and was now beginning to offer her congratulations on the event. In order to escape indirect appeals and pointed interpretations of careless words, Madame Beauvisage took a vacant place at a whist-table and devoted her mind to the winning of one hundred fishes. One hundred fishes, or counters, made fifty sous! When a player had lost that sum it was talked of in Arcis for a couple of days.

Cecile went to talk with Mademoiselle Mollot, one of her good friends, appearing to be seized with redoubled affection for her. Mademoiselle Mollot was the beauty of Arcis, just as Cecile was the heiress. Monsieur Mollot, clerk of the court, lived on the Grande-Place in a house constructed in the same manner as that of Beauvisage on the Place du Pont. Madame Mollot, forever seated at the window of her salon on the ground-floor, was attacked (as the result of that situation) by intense, acute, insatiable curiosity, now become a chronic and inveterate disease. The moment a peasant entered the square from the road to Brienne she saw him, and watched to see what business could have brought him to Arcis; she had no peace of mind until that peasant was explained. She spent her life in judging the events, men, things, and households of Arcis.

The ambition of the house of Mollot, father, mother, and daughter, was to marry Ernestine (an only daughter) to Antonin Goulard. Consequently the refusal of the Beauvisage parents to entertain the proposals of the sub-prefect had tightened the bonds of friendship between the two families.

“There’s an impatient man!” said Ernestine to Cecile, indicating Simon Giguet. “He wants to come and talk with us; but every one who comes in feels bound to congratulate him. I’ve heard him say fifty times already: ‘It is, I think, less to me than to my father that this compliment of my fellow-citizens has been paid; but, in any case, pray believe that I shall be devoted not only to our general interests but to yours individually.’ I can guess those words by the motion of his lips, and all the while he is looking at you with an air of martyrdom.”

“Ernestine,” replied Cecile, “don’t leave me the whole evening; I don’t want to listen to his proposals made under cover of ‘alases!’ and mingled with sighs.”

“Don’t you want to be the wife of a Keeper of the Seals?”

“Ah! that’s all nonsense,” said Cecile, laughing.

“But I assure you,” persisted Ernestine, “that just before you came in Monsieur Godivet, the registrar, was declaring with enthusiasm that Simon would be Keeper of the Seals in three years.”

“Do they count on the influence of the Comte de Gondreville?” asked the sub-prefect, coming up to the two girls and guessing that they were making fun of his friend Giguet.

“Ah! Monsieur Antonin,” said the handsome Ernestine, “you who promised my mother to find out all about the *stranger*, what have you heard about him?”

“The events of to-day, Mademoiselle, are so much more important,” said Antonin, taking a seat beside Cecile, like a diplomat delighted to escape general attention by conversing with two girls. “All my career as sub-prefect or prefect is at stake.”

“What! I thought you allowed your friend Simon to be nominated unanimously.”

“Simon is my friend, but the government is my master, and I expect to do my best to prevent Simon from being elected. And here comes Madame Mollot, who owes me her concurrence as the wife of a man whose functions attach him to the government.”

“I am sure we ask nothing better than to be on your side,” replied the sheriff’s wife. “Mollot has told me,” she continued in a low voice, “what took place here to-day – it is pitiable! Only one

man showed talent, and that was Achille Pigoult. Everybody agrees that he would make a fine orator in the Chamber; and therefore, though he has nothing, and my daughter has a *dot* of sixty thousand francs, not to speak of what, as an only child, she will inherit from us and also from her uncle at Mollot and from my aunt Lambert at Troyes, – well, I declare to you that if Monsieur Achille Pigoult did us the honor to ask her to wife, I should give her to him; yes, I should – provided always she liked him. But the silly little goose wants to marry as she pleases; it is Mademoiselle Beauvisage who puts such notions into her head.”

The sub-prefect received this double broadside like a man who knows he has thirty thousand francs a year, and expects a prefecture.

“Mademoiselle is right,” he said, looking at Cecile; “she is rich enough to make a marriage of love.”

“Don’t let us talk about marriage,” said Ernestine; “it saddens my poor dear Cecile, who was owing to me just now that in order not to be married for her money, but for herself, she should like an affair with some stranger who knew nothing of Arcis and her future expectations as Lady Croesus, and would spin her a romance to end in true love and a marriage.”

“That’s a very pretty idea!” cried Olivier Vinet, joining the group of young ladies in order to get away from the partisans of Simon, the idol of the day. “I always knew that Mademoiselle had as much sense as money.”

“And,” continued Ernestine, “she has selected for the hero of her romance – ”

“Oh!” interrupted Madame Mollot, “an old man of fifty! – fie!”

“How do you know he is fifty?” asked Olivier Vinet, laughing.

“How?” replied Madame Mollot. “Why, this morning I was so puzzled that I got out my opera-glass – ”

“Bravo!” cried the superintendent of *ponts et chaussées*, who was paying court to the mother to obtain the daughter.

“And so,” continued Madame Mollot, “I was able to see him shaving; with such elegant razors! – mounted in gold, or silver-gilt!”

“Gold! gold, of course!” said Vinet. “When things are unknown they should always be imagined of the finest quality. Consequently I, not having seen this gentleman, am perfectly sure that he is at least a count.”

This speech created a laugh; and the laughing group excited the jealousy of a group of dowagers and the attention of a troop of men in black who surrounded Simon Giguët. As for the latter, he was chafing in despair at not being able to lay his fortune and his future at the feet of the rich Cecile.

“Yes,” continued Vinet, “a man distinguished for his birth, for his manners, his fortune, his equipages, – a lion, a dandy, a yellow-kid-glover!”

“Monsieur Olivier,” said Ernestine, “he drives the prettiest tilbury you ever saw.”

“What? Antonin, you never told me he had a tilbury when we were talking about that conspirator this morning. A tilbury! Why, that’s an extenuating circumstance; he can’t be a republican.”

“Mesdemoiselles, there is nothing that I will not do in the interests of your amusement,” said Antonin Goulard. “I will instantly proceed to ascertain if this individual is a count, and if he is, what kind of count.”

“You can make a report upon him,” said the superintendent of bridges.

“For the use of all future sub-prefects,” added Olivier Vinet.

“How can you do it?” asked Madame Mollot.

“Oh!” replied the sub-prefect, “ask Mademoiselle Beauvisage whom she would accept as her husband among all of us here present; she will not answer. Allow me the same discretion. Mesdemoiselles, restrain your anxiety; in ten minutes you shall know whether the Unknown is a count or a commercial traveller.”

X. THE REVELATIONS OF AN OPERA-GLASS

Antonin Goulard left the little group of young ladies, in which, besides Cecile and Ernestine, were Mademoiselle Berton, daughter of the tax-collector, – an insignificant young person who played the part of satellite to Cecile, – and Mademoiselle Herbelot, sister of the second notary of Arcis, an old maid of thirty, soured, affected, and dressed like all old maids; for she wore, over a bombazine gown, an embroidered fichu, the corners of which, gathered to the front of the bodice, were knotted together after the well-known fashion under the Terror.

“Julien,” said the sub-prefect to his valet, who was waiting in the antechamber, “you who served six years at Gondreville ought to know how a count’s coronet is made.”

“Yes, monsieur; it has pearls on its nine points.”

“Very good. Go to the Mulet, and try to clap your eye on the tilbury of the gentleman who is stopping there, and then come and tell me what is painted on it. Do your business thoroughly, and bring me all the gossip of the inn. If you see the little groom, ask him at what hour to-morrow his master can receive the sub-prefect – in case you find the nine pearls. Don’t drink, don’t gossip yourself, and come back quickly; and as soon as you get back let me know it by coming to the door of the salon.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

The Mulet inn, as we have already said, stands on the square, at the opposite corner to the garden wall of the Marion estate on the other side of the road leading to Brienne. Therefore the solution of the problem could be rapid. Antonin Goulard returned to his place by Cecile to await results.

“We talked so much about the stranger yesterday that I dreamed of him all night,” said Madame Mollot.

“Ha! ha! do you still dream of unknown heroes, fair lady?” said Vinet.

“You are very impertinent; if I chose I could make you dream of me,” she retorted. “So this morning when I rose – ”

It may not be useless to say that Madame Mollot was considered a clever woman in Arcis; that is, she expressed herself fluently and abused that advantage. A Parisian, wandering by chance into these regions, like the Unknown, would have thought her excessively garrulous.

“ – I was, naturally, making my toilet, and as I looked mechanically about me – ”

“Through the window?” asked Antonin.

“Certainly; my dressing-room opens on the street. Now you know, of course, that Poupart has put the stranger into one of the rooms exactly opposite to mine – ”

“One room, mamma!” interrupted Ernestine. “The count occupies three rooms! The little groom, dressed all in black, is in the first. They have made a salon of the next, and the Unknown sleeps in the third.”

“Then he has half the rooms in the inn,” remarked Mademoiselle Herbelot.

“Well, young ladies, and what has that to do with his person?” said Madame Mollot, sharply, not pleased at the interruption. “I am talking of the man himself – ”

“Don’t interrupt the orator,” put in Vinet.

“As I was stooping – ”

“Seated?” asked Antonin.

“Madame was of course as she naturally would be, – making her toilet and looking at the Mulet,” said Vinet.

In the provinces such jokes are prized, for people have so long said everything to each other that they have recourse at last to the sort of nonsense our fathers indulged in before the introduction of English hypocrisy, – one of those products against which custom-houses are powerless.

“Don’t interrupt the orator,” repeated Cecile Beauvisage to Vinet, with whom she exchanged a smile.

“My eyes involuntarily fell on the window of the room in which the stranger had slept the night before. I don’t know what time he went to bed, although I was awake till past midnight; but I have the misfortune to be married to a man who snores fit to crack the planks and the rafters. If I fall asleep first, oh! I sleep so sound nothing can wake me; but if Mollot drops off first my night is ruined – ”

“Don’t you ever go off together?” said Achille Pigoult, joining the group. “I see you are talking of sleep.”

“Hush, naughty boy!” replied Madame Mollot, graciously.

“Do you know what they mean?” whispered Cecile to Ernestine.

“At any rate, he was not in at one o’clock in the morning,” continued Madame Mollot.

“Then he defrauded you! – came home without your knowing it!” said Achille Pigoult. “Ha! that man is sly indeed; he’ll put us all in his pouch and sell us in the market-place.”

“To whom?” asked Vinet.

“Oh! to a project! to an idea! to a system!” replied the notary, to whom Olivier smiled with a knowing air.

“Imagine my surprise,” continued Madame Mollot, “when I saw a stuff, a material, of splendid magnificence, most beautiful! dazzling! I said to myself, ‘That must be a dressing-gown of the spun-glass material I have sometimes seen in exhibitions of industrial products.’ So I fetched my opera-glass to examine it. But, good gracious! what do you think I saw? Above the dressing-gown, where the head ought to have been, I saw an enormous mass, something like a knee – I can’t tell you how my curiosity was excited.”

“I can conceive it,” said Antonin.

“No, you can *not* conceive it,” said Madame Mollot; “for this knee – ”

“Ah! I understand,” cried Olivier Vinet, laughing; “the Unknown was also making his toilet, and you saw his two knees.”

“No, no!” cried Madame Mollot; “you are putting incongruities into my mouth. The stranger was standing up; he held a sponge in his hand above an immense basin, and – none of your jokes, Monsieur Olivier! – it wasn’t his knee, it was his head! He was washing his bald head; he hasn’t a spear of hair upon it.”

“Impudent man!” said Antonin. “He certainly can’t have come with ideas of marriage in that head. Here we must have hair in order to be married. That’s essential.”

“I am therefore right in saying that our Unknown visitor must be fifty years old. Nobody ever takes to a wig before that time of life. After a time, when his toilet was finished, he opened his window and looked out; and *then* he wore a splendid head of black hair. He turned his eyeglass full on me, – for by that time, I was in my balcony. Therefore, my dear Cecile, you see for yourself that you can’t take that man for the hero of your romance.”

“Why not? Men of fifty are not to be despised, if they are counts,” said Ernestine.

“Heavens! what has age to do with it?” said Mademoiselle Herbelot.

“Provided one gets a husband,” added Vinet, whose cold maliciousness made him feared.

“Yes,” replied the old maid, feeling the cut, “I should prefer a man of fifty, indulgent, kind, and considerate, to a young man without a heart, whose wit would bite every one, even his wife.”

“This is all very well for conversation,” retorted Vinet, “but in order to love the man of fifty and reject the other, it is necessary to have the opportunity to choose.”

“Oh!” said Madame Mollot, in order to stop this passage at arms between the old maid and Vinet, who always went to far, “when a woman has had experience of life she knows that a husband of fifty or one of twenty-five is absolutely the same thing if she merely respects him. The important things in marriage are the benefits to be derived from it. If Mademoiselle Beauvisage wants to go to Paris and shine there – and in her place I should certainly feel so – she ought not to take a husband in

Arcis. If I had the fortune she will have, I should give my hand to a count, to a man who would put me in a high social position, and I shouldn't ask to see the certificate of his birth."

"It would satisfy you to see his toilet," whispered Vinet in her ear.

"But the king makes counts," said Madame Marion, who had now joined the group and was surveying the bevy of young ladies.

"Ah! madame," remarked Vinet, "but some young girls prefer their counts already made."

"Well, Monsieur Antonin," said Cecile, laughing at Vinet's sarcasm. "Your ten minutes have expired, and you haven't told us whether the Unknown is a count or not."

"I shall keep my promise," replied the sub-prefect, perceiving at that moment the head of his valet in the doorway; and again he left his place beside Cecile.

"You are talking of the stranger," said Madame Marion. "Is anything really known about him?"

"No, madame," replied Achille Pigoult; "but he is, without knowing it, like the clown of a circus, the centre of the eyes of the two thousand inhabitants of this town. I know one thing about him," added the little notary.

"Oh, tell us, Monsieur Achille!" cried Ernestine, eagerly.

"His tiger's name is Paradise!"

"Paradise!" echoed every one included in the little circle.

"Can a man be called Paradise?" asked Madame Herbelot, who had joined her sister-in-law.

"It tends to prove," continued the notary, "that the master is an angel; for when his tiger follows him – you understand."

"It is the road of Paradise! very good, that," said Madame Marion, anxious to flatter Achille Pigoult in the interests of her nephew.

"Monsieur," said Antonin's valet in the dining-room, "the tilbury has a coat of arms – "

"Coat of arms!"

"Yes, and droll enough they are! There's a coronet with nine points and pearls – "

"Then he's a count!"

"And a monster with wings, flying like a postilion who has dropped something. And here is what is written on the belt," added the man, taking a paper from his pocket. "Mademoiselle Anicette, the Princesse de Cadignan's lady's maid, who came in a carriage" (the Cinq-Cygne carriage before the door of the Mulet!) "to bring a letter to the gentleman, wrote it down for me."

"Give it to me."

The sub-prefect read the words: *Quo me trahit fortuna.*

Though he was not strong enough in French blazon to know the house that bore that device, Antonin felt sure that the Cinq-Cygnets would not send their chariot, nor the Princess de Cadignan a missive by her maid, except to a person of the highest nobility.

"Ha! so you know the maid of the Princess de Cadignan! happy man!" said Antonin.

Julien, a young countryman, after serving six months in the household of the Comte de Gondreville, had entered the service of the sub-prefect, who wanted a servant of the *right style*.

"But, monsieur, Anicette is my father's god-daughter. Papa, who wanted to do well by the girl, whose father was dead, sent her to a dressmaker in Paris because my mother could not endure her."

"Is she pretty?"

"Rather; the proof is that she got into trouble in Paris; but finally, as she has talent and can make gowns and dress hair, she got a place with the princess."

"What did she tell you about Cinq-Cygne? Is there much company?"

"A great deal, monsieur. There's the princess and Monsieur d'Arthez, the Duc de Maufrigneuse and the duchess and the young marquis. In fact the chateau is full. They expect Monseigneur the Bishop of Troyes to-night."

"Monsieur Troubert! I should like to know how long he is going to stay."

“Anicette thinks for some time; and she believes he is coming to meet the gentleman who is now at the Mulet. They expect more company. The coachman told me they were talking a great deal about the election. Monsieur le president Michu is expected in a few days.”

“Try to bring that lady’s maid into town on pretence of shopping. Have you any designs upon her?”

“If she has any savings I don’t know but what I might. She is a sly one, though.”

“Tell her to come and see you at the sub-prefecture.”

“Yes, monsieur. I’ll go and tell her now.”

“Don’t say anything about me, or she might not come.”

“Ah! monsieur; haven’t I served at Gondreville?”

“You don’t know why they sent that message from Cinq-Cygne at this hour, do you? It is half-past nine o’clock.”

“It must have been something pressing. The gentleman had only just returned from Gondreville.”

“Gondreville! – has he been to Gondreville?”

“He dined there, monsieur. If you went to the Mulet you’d laugh! The little tiger is, saving your presence, as drunk as a fiddler. He drank such a lot of champagne in the servants’ hall that he can’t stand on his legs; they have been filling him for fun.”

“And the count?”

“The count had gone to bed; but as soon as he received the letter he got up. He is now dressing himself; and they are putting the horse in the tilbury. The count is to spend the night at Cinq-Cygne.”

“He must be some great personage.”

“Oh, yes, monsieur; for Gothard, the steward of Cinq-Cygne, came this morning to see his brother-in-law Poupart, and warned him to be very discreet about the gentleman and to serve him like a king.”

“Vinet must be right,” thought the sub-prefect. “Can there be some cabal on foot?”

“It was Duc Georges de Maufrigneuse who sent Gothard to the Mulet. Poupart came to the meeting here this morning only because the gentleman wished him to do so; if he had sent him to Paris, he’d go. Gothard told Poupart to keep silent about the gentleman, and to fool all inquisitive people.”

“If you can get Anicette here, don’t fail to let me know,” said Antonin.

“But I could see her at Cinq-Cygne if monsieur would send me to his house at Val-Preux.”

“That’s an idea. You might profit by the chariot to get there. But what reason could you give to the little groom?”

“He’s a madcap, that boy, monsieur. Would you believe it, drunk as he is, he has just mounted his master’s thoroughbred, a horse that can do twenty miles an hour, and started for Troyes with a letter in order that it may reach Paris to-morrow! And only nine years and a half old! What will he be at twenty?”

The sub-prefect listened mechanically to these remarks. Julien gossiped on, his master listening, absorbed in thought about the stranger.

“Wait here,” he said to the man as he turned with slow steps to re-enter the salon. “What a mess!” he thought to himself, – “a man who dines at Gondreville and spends the night at Cinq-Cygnés! Mysteries indeed!”

“Well?” cried the circle around Mademoiselle Beauvisage as soon as he reappeared.

“He is a count, and *vieille roche*, I answer for it.”

“Oh! how I should like to see him!” cried Cecile.

“Mademoiselle,” said Antonin, smiling and looking maliciously at Madame Mollet, “he is tall and well-made and does not wear a wig. His little groom was as drunk as the twenty-four cantons; they filled him with champagne at Gondreville and that little scamp, only nine years old, answered

my man Julien, who asked him about his master's wig, with all the assumption of an old valet: 'My master! wear a wig! – if he did I'd leave him. He dyes his hair and that's bad enough.'"

"Your opera-glass magnifies," said Achille Pigoult to Madame Mollot, who laughed.

"Well, the tiger of the handsome count, drunk as he is, is now riding to Troyes to post a letter, and he'll get there, as they say, in five-quarters of an hour."

"I'd like to have that tiger," said Vinet.

"If the count dined at Gondreville we shall soon know all about him," remarked Cecile; "for my grandpapa is going there to-morrow morning."

"What will strike you as very strange," said Antonin Goulard, "is that the party at Cinq-Cygne have just sent Mademoiselle Anicette, the maid of the Princesse de Cadignan, in the Cinq-Cygne carriage, with a note to the stranger, and he is going now to pass the night there."

"*Ah ca!*" said Olivier Vinet, "then he is not a man; he's a devil, a phoenix, he will poculate – "

"Ah, fie! monsieur," said Madame Mollot, "you use words that are really – "

"'Poculate' is a word of the highest latinity, madame," replied Vinet, gravely. "So, as I said, he will poculate with Louis Philippe in the morning, and banquet at the Holy-Rood with Charles the Tenth at night. There is but one reason that allows a decent man to go to both camps – from Montague to Capulet! Ha, ha! I know who that stranger is. He's – "

"The president of a railway from Paris to Lyons, or Paris to Dijon, or from Montereau to Troyes."

"That's true," said Antonin. "You have it. There's nothing but speculation that is welcomed everywhere."

"Yes, just see how great names, great families, the old and the new peerage are rushing hot-foot into enterprises and partnerships," said Achille Pigoult.

"Francs attract the Franks," remarked Olivier Vinet, without a smile.

"You are not an *olive*-branch of peace," said Madame Mollot, laughing.

"But is it not demoralizing to see such names as Verneuil, Maufrigneuse, and Herouville side by side with those of du Tillet and Nucingen in the Bourse speculations?"

"Our great Unknown is undoubtedly an embryo railway," said Olivier Vinet.

"Well, to-morrow all Arcis will be upside-down about it," said Achille Pigoult. "I shall call upon the Unknown and ask him to make me notary of the affair. There'll be two thousand deeds to draw, at the least."

"Our romance is turning into a locomotive," said Ernestine to Cecile.

"A count with a railway is all the more marriageable," remarked Achille Pigoult. "But who knows whether he is a bachelor?"

"Oh! I shall know that to-morrow from grandpapa," cried Cecile, with pretended enthusiasm.

"What a jest!" said Madame Mollot. "You can't really mean, my little Cecile, that you are thinking of that stranger?"

"But the husband is always the stranger," interposed Olivier Vinet, making a sign to Mademoiselle Beauvisage which she fully understood.

"Why shouldn't I think of him?" asked Cecile; "that isn't compromising. Besides, he is, so these gentlemen say, either some great speculator, or some great seigneur, and either would suit me. I love Paris; and I want a house, a carriage, an opera-box, etc., in Paris."

"That's right," said Vinet. "When people dream, they needn't refuse themselves anything. If I had the pleasure of being your brother I should marry you to the young Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, who seems to me a lively young scamp who will make the money dance, and will laugh at his mother's prejudices against the actors in the famous Simeuse melodrama."

"It would be easier for you to make yourself prime-minister," said Madame Marion. "There will never be any alliance between the granddaughter of Grevin and the Cinq-Cygnés."

“Romeo came within an ace of marrying Juliet,” remarked Achille Pigoult, “and Mademoiselle is more beautiful than – ”

“Oh! if you are going to quote operas and opera beauties!” said Herbelot the notary, naively, having finished his game of whist.

“My legal brother,” said Achille Pigoult, “is not very strong on the history of the middle ages.”

“Come, Malvina!” said the stout notary to his wife, making no reply to his young associate.

“Tell me, Monsieur Antonin,” said Cecile to the sub-prefect, “you spoke of Anicette, the maid of the Princesse de Cadignan; do you know her?”

“No, but Julien does; she is the goddaughter of his father, and they are good friends together.”

“Then try, through Julien, to get her to live with us. Mamma wouldn’t consider wages.”

“Mademoiselle, to hear is to obey, as they say to despots in Asia,” replied the sub-prefect. “Just see to what lengths I will go in order to serve you.”

And he left the room to give Julien orders to go with Anicette in the chariot and coax her away from the princess at any price.

XI. IN WHICH THE CANDIDATE BEGINS TO LOSE VOTES

At this moment Simon Giguet, who had got through his bowing and scraping to all the influential men of Arcis, and who regarded himself as sure of his election, joined the circle around Cecile and Mademoiselle Mollet. The evening was far advanced. Ten o'clock had struck. After an enormous consumption of cakes, orgeat, punch, lemonade, and various syrups, those who had come that evening solely for political reasons and who were not accustomed to Madame Marion's floors, to them aristocratic, departed, – all the more willingly, because they were unaccustomed to sitting up so late. The evening then began to take on its usual air of intimacy. Simon Giguet hoped that he could now exchange a few words with Cecile, and he looked at her like a conqueror. The look displeased her.

“My dear fellow,” said Antonin to Simon, observing on his friend's face the glory of success, “you come at a moment when the noses of all the young men in Arcis are put out of joint.”

“Very much so,” said Ernestine, whom Cecile had nudged with her elbow. “We are distracted, Cecile and I, about the great Unknown, and we are quarrelling for him.”

“But,” said Cecile, “he is no longer unknown; he is a count.”

“Some adventurer!” replied Simon Giguet, with an air of contempt.

“Will you say that, Monsieur Simon,” answered Cecile, feeling piqued, “of a man to whom the Princesse de Cadignan has just sent her servants, who dined at Gondreville to-day, and is to spend this evening with the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne?”

This was said sharply, and in so hard a tone that Simon was disconcerted.

“Ah, mademoiselle,” said Olivier Vinet, “if we said to each other's faces what we all say behind our backs, social life wouldn't be possible. The pleasures of society, especially in the provinces, are to slander and backbite our neighbors.”

“Monsieur Simon is jealous of your enthusiasm for the mysterious count,” said Ernestine.

“It seems to me,” said Cecile, “that Monsieur Simon has no right to be jealous of my affections.”

After which remark, uttered in a way to dumfound Simon, Cecile rose; the others made way for her and she went to her mother, who was just finishing her rubber of whist.

“My dearest!” cried Madame Marion, hurrying after the heiress, “I think you are rather hard on my poor Simon.”

“What has she done, my dear little kitten?” asked Madame Beauvisage.

“Mamma, Monsieur Simon called my great Unknown an adventurer!”

Simon had followed his aunt and was now beside the card-table. The four persons whose interests were concerned were thus in the middle of the salon, – Cecile and her mother on one side of the table, Madame Marion and her nephew on the other.

“Really, madame,” said Simon Giguet, “there must be a strong desire to find fault and to quarrel with me simply because I happened to say that a gentleman whom all Arcis is talking about and who stops at the Mulet – ”

“Do you think he has come here to put himself in competition with you?” said Madame Beauvisage jestingly.

“I should be very indignant with him certainly if he were to cause the slightest misunderstanding between Mademoiselle Cecile and myself,” said the candidate, with a supplicating look at the young girl.

“You gave your opinion, monsieur, in a decisive manner which proves that you are very despotic,” she replied; “but you are right; if you wish to be minister you ought to be decisive.”

Here Madame Marion took Madame Beauvisage by the arm and led her to a sofa. Cecile, finding herself alone, returned to her former seat to avoid hearing Simon's answer to her speech, and the candidate was left standing rather foolishly before the table, where he mechanically played with the counters.

“My dear friend,” said Madame Marion in a low voice to Madame Beauvisage, “you see that nothing can now hinder my nephew’s election.”

“I am delighted both for your sake and for the Chamber of Deputies,” said Severine.

“My nephew is certain to go far, my dear; and I’ll tell you why: his own fortune, that which his father will leave him and mine, will amount altogether to some thirty thousand francs a year. When a man is a deputy and has a fortune like that, he can aspire to anything.”

“Madame, he has our utmost admiration and our most earnest wishes for the success of his political career; but – ”

“I am not asking for an answer,” said Madame Marion, hastily interrupting her friend. “I only beg you to reflect on the following suggestions: Do our children suit each other? Can we marry them? We should then live in Paris during the sessions; and who knows if the deputy of Arcis may not be settled there permanently in some fine place in the magistracy? Look at Monsieur Vinet of Provins, how he has made his way. People blamed Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf for marrying him; yet she will soon be wife of the Keeper of the Seals; Monsieur Vinet can be peer of France whenever he pleases.”

“Madame, I have not the power to marry my daughter according to my own tastes. In the first place, her father and I leave her absolutely free to choose for herself. If she wanted to marry the ‘great Unknown’ and we found that the match was suitable, we should give our consent. Besides this, Cecile is wholly dependent on her grandfather, who intends to give her on her marriage the Hotel de Beauseant in Paris, which he purchased for us six years ago; the value of which is now rated at eight hundred thousand francs. It is one of the finest houses in the faubourg Saint-Germain. Moreover, he intends to add two hundred thousand francs for the cost of fitting it up. A grandfather who behaves in this way, and who can influence my mother-in-law to make a few sacrifices for her granddaughter in expectation of a suitable marriage, has a right to advise – ”

“Certainly,” said Madame Marion, stupefied by this confidence, which made the marriage of her nephew and Cecile extremely difficult.

“Even if Cecile had nothing to expect from her grandfather Grevin,” continued Madame Beauvisage, “she would not marry without first consulting him. If you have any proposals to make, go and see my father.”

“Very good; I will go,” said Madame Marion.

Madame Beauvisage made a sign to Cecile, and together they left the salon.

The next day Antonin and Frederic Marest found themselves, according to their usual custom, with Monsieur Martener and Olivier, beneath the lindens of the Avenue of Sighs, smoking their cigars and walking up and down. This daily promenade is one of the petty pleasures of government officials in the provinces when they happen to be on good terms with one another.

After they had made a few turns, Simon Giguet came up and joined them saying to the sub-prefect with a mysterious air: —

“You ought to be faithful to an old comrade who wishes to get you the rosette of an officer and a prefecture.”

“You are beginning your political career betimes,” said Antonin, laughing. “You are trying to corrupt me, rapid puritan!”

“Will you support me?”

“My dear fellow, you know very well that Bar-sur-Aube votes here. Who can guarantee a majority under such circumstances? My colleague of Bar-sur-Aube would complain of me if I did not unite my efforts with his in support of the government. Your promise is conditional; whereas my dismissal would be certain.”

“But I have no competitors.”

“You think so,” said Antonin, “but some one is sure to turn up; you may rely on that.”

“Why doesn’t my aunt come, when she knows I am on a gridiron!” exclaimed Giguet, suddenly. “These three hours are like three years!”

His secret had escaped him and he now admitted to his friend that Madame Marion had gone on his behalf to old Grevin with a formal proposal for Cecile’s hand.

The pair had now reached the Brienne road opposite to the Mulet hostelry. While the lawyer looked down the street towards the bridge his aunt would have to cross, the sub-prefect examined the gullies made by the rain in the open square. Arcis is not paved. The plains of Champagne furnish no material fit for building, nor even pebbles large enough for cobble-stone pavements. One or two streets and a few detached places are imperfectly macadamized and that is saying enough to describe their condition after a rain. The sub-prefect gave himself an appearance of occupation by apparently exercising his thoughts on this important object; but he lost not a single expression of suffering on the anxious face of his companion.

At this moment, the stranger was returning from the Chateau de Cinq-Cygne, where he had apparently passed the night. Goulard resolved to clear up, himself, the mystery wrapped about the Unknown, who was physically enveloped in an overcoat of thick cloth called a *paleto*, then the fashion. A mantle, thrown across his knees for a covering, hid the lower half of his body, while an enormous muffler of red cashmere covered his neck and head to the eyes. His hat, jauntily tipped to one side, was, nevertheless, not ridiculous. Never was a mystery more mysteriously bundled up and swathed.

“Look out!” cried the tiger, who preceded the tilbury on horseback. “Open, papa Poupart, open!” he screamed in his shrill little voice.

The three servants of the inn ran out, and the tilbury drove in without any one being able to see a single feature of the stranger’s face. The sub-prefect followed the tilbury into the courtyard, and went to the door of the inn.

“Madame Poupart,” said Antonin, “will you ask Monsieur – Monsieur – ”

“I don’t know his name,” said Gothard’s sister.

“You do wrong! The rules of the police are strict, and Monsieur Groslier doesn’t trifle, like some commissaries of police.”

“Innkeepers are never to blame about election-time,” remarked the little tiger, getting off his horse.

“I’ll repeat that to Vinet,” thought the sub-prefect. “Go and ask your master if he can receive the sub-prefect of Arcis.”

Presently Paradise returned.

“Monsieur begs Monsieur the sub-prefect to come up; he will be delighted to see him.”

“My lad,” said Olivier Vinet, who with the two other functionaries had joined the sub-prefect before the inn, “how much does your master give a year for a boy of your cut and wits?”

“Give, monsieur! What do you take me for? Monsieur le comte lets himself be milked, and I’m content.”

“That boy was raised in a good school!” said Frederic Marest.

“The highest school, monsieur,” said the urchin, amazing the four friends with his perfect self-possession.

“What a Figaro!” cried Vinet.

“Mustn’t lower one’s price,” said the infant. “My master calls me a little Robert-Macaire, and since we have learned how to invest our money we are Figaro, plus a savings bank.”

“How much do you earn?”

“Oh! some races I make two or three thousand francs – and without selling my master, monsieur.”

“Sublime infant!” said Vinet; “he knows the turf.”

“Yes, and all gentlemen riders,” said the child, sticking out his tongue at Vinet.

Antonin Goulard, ushered by the landlord into a room which had been turned into a salon, felt himself instantly under the focus of an eyeglass held in the most impertinent manner by the stranger.

“Monsieur,” said the sub-prefect with a certain official hauteur, “I have just learned from the wife of the innkeeper that you refuse to conform to the ordinances of the police, and as I do not doubt that you are a person of distinction, I have come myself – ”

“Is your name Goulard?” demanded the stranger in a high voice.

“I am the sub-prefect, monsieur,” replied Antonin Goulard.

“Your father belonged to the Simeuse family?”

“And I, monsieur, belong to the government; that is how times differ.”

“You have a servant named Julien, who has tried to entice the Princesse de Cadignan’s maid away from her?”

“Monsieur, I do not allow any one to speak to me in this manner,” said Goulard; “you misunderstand my character.”

“And you want to know about mine!” returned the Unknown. “Well, I will now make myself known. You can write in the landlord’s book: ‘Impertinent fellow. Direct from Paris. Age doubtful. Travelling for pleasure.’ It would be rather a novelty in France to imitate England and let people come and go as they please, without tormenting them at every turn for ‘papers.’ I have no passport; now, what will you do to me?”

“The *procureur-du-roi* is walking up and down there under the lindens,” said the sub-prefect.

“Monsieur Marest! Wish him good-morning from me.”

“But who are you?”

“Whatever you wish me to be, my dear Monsieur Goulard,” said the stranger. “You alone shall decide *what* I am to be in this department. Give me some advice on that head. Here, read that.”

And the stranger handed the sub-prefect the following letter: —

(Confidential.) Prefecture of the Aube.

Monsieur the Sub-prefect, – You will consult with the bearer of this letter as to the election at Arcis, and you will conform to all the suggestions and requests he may make to you. I request you to conduct this matter with the utmost discretion, and to treat the bearer with all the respect that is due to his station.

The letter was written and signed by the prefect of the Aube.

“You have been talking prose without knowing it,” said the Unknown, taking back the letter.

Antonin Goulard, already struck with the aristocratic tone and manners of this personage, became respectful.

“How was that, monsieur?” he asked.

“By endeavoring to entice Anicette. She told us of the attempts of your man Julien to corrupt her. But my little tiger, Paradise, got the better of him, and he ended by admitting that you wanted to put Anicette into the service of one of the richest families in Arcis. Now, as the richest family in Arcis is the Beauvisage family I make no doubt it is Mademoiselle Cecile who covets this treasure.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Very good; then Anicette shall enter the Beauvisage household at once.”

He whistled. Paradise presented himself so rapidly that his master said: “You were listening!”

“In spite of myself, Monsieur le comte; these partitions are nothing but paper. But if Monsieur le comte prefers, I will move upstairs.”

“No, you can listen; it is your perquisite. It is for me to speak low when I don’t want you to know my affairs. Go back to Cinq-Cygne, and give this gold piece to that little Anicette from me. Julien shall have the credit of enticing her away,” he continued, addressing Goulard. “That bit of gold will inform her that she is to follow him. Anicette may be useful to the success of our candidate.”

“Anicette?”

“Monsieur, it is now thirty-two years since lady’s-maids have served my purposes. I had my first adventure at the age of thirteen, like the regent, the great-great-grandfather of our present King. Do you know the fortune of this Mademoiselle Beauvisage?”

“I can’t help knowing it, monsieur, for yesterday at Madame Marion’s, Madame Beauvisage said openly that Monsieur Grevin, Cecile’s grandfather, would give his granddaughter the hotel de Beauseant in Paris and two hundred thousand francs for a wedding present.”

The stranger’s eyes expressed no surprise. He seemed to consider the fortune rather paltry.

“Do you know Arcis well?” he asked of Goulard.

“I am the sub-prefect and I was born here.”

“What is the best way to balk curiosity?”

“By satisfying it. For instance, Monsieur le Comte has a baptismal name; let him register that with the title of count.”

“Very good; Comte Maxime.”

“And if monsieur will assume the position of a railway official, Arcis will be content; it will amuse itself by floating that stick at least for a fortnight.”

“No, I prefer to be concerned in irrigation; it is less common. I have come down to survey the wastelands of Champagne in order to reclaim them. That will be, my good Monsieur Goulard, a reason for inviting me to dine with you to-morrow to meet the mayor and his family; I wish to see them, and study them.”

“I shall be only too happy to receive you,” said the sub-prefect; “but I must ask your indulgence for the deficiencies of my little household.”

“If I succeed in managing the election of Arcis according to the wishes of those who have sent me here, you, my dear friend, will be made a prefect. Here, read these”; and he held out two letters to his visitor.

“Very good, Monsieur le comte,” said Antonin, returning them.

“Make a list of all the votes on which the ministry may count. Above all, let no one suspect that you and I understand each other. I am a speculator in land, and I don’t care a fig for elections.”

“I will send the commissary of police to force you to inscribe your name on Poupart’s register.”

“So do. Adieu, monsieur. Heavens! what a region this is,” said the count, in a loud voice; “one can’t take a step without having the community, sub-prefect and all, on one’s back.”

“You will have to answer to the commissary of police, monsieur,” said Antonin, in an equally loud tone.

And for the next twenty minutes Madame Mollot talked of the altercation that took place between the sub-prefect and the stranger.

“Well, what wood is the beam that has plumped into our bog made of?” said Olivier Vinet when Antonin Goulard rejoined them on leaving the Mulet.

“He is a Comte Maxime who is here to study the geological system of Champagne, with a view to finding mineral waters,” replied the sub-prefect, with an easy manner.

“Say a speculator,” said Oliver.

“Does he expect to get the natives to lay out capital?” asked Monsieur Martener.

“I doubt if our royalists will go into that kind of mining,” remarked Vinet, laughing.

“What should you think from the air and gestures of Madame Marion?” said the sub-prefect turning off the subject by pointing to Madame Marion and Simon, who were deep in conversation.

Simon had gone toward the bridge to meet his aunt, and was now walking with her up the square.

“If he was accepted one word would suffice,” said the shrewd Olivier.

“Well?” said all the officials when Simon came to them under the lindens.

“My aunt thinks the matter very hopeful,” replied Simon. “Madame Beauvisage and old Grevin, who has just gone to Gondreville, were not at all surprised at my proposals; they talked of our respective fortunes, and said they wished to leave Cecile perfectly free to make her choice. Besides

which, Madame Beauvisage said that, as for herself, she saw no objection to an alliance by which she should feel herself honored; although she postponed all answer until after my election, and possibly my first appearance in the Chamber. Old Grevin said he should consult the Comte de Gondreville, without whose advice he never took any important step.”

“All of which means,” said Goulard, point-blank, “that you will never marry Cecile, my old fellow.”

“Why not?” said Giguet, ironically.

“My dear friend, Madame Beauvisage and her daughter spend four evenings every week in the salon of your aunt; your aunt is the most distinguished woman in Arcis; and she is, though twenty years the elder, an object of envy to Madame Beauvisage; don’t you see, therefore, that they wished to wrap up their refusal in certain civilities?”

“Not to say entire yes or no in such cases,” said Vinet, “is to say *no*, with due regard to the intimacy of the two families. Though Madame Beauvisage has the largest fortune in Arcis, Madame Marion is the most esteemed woman in the place; for, with the exception of our chief-justice’s wife, who sees no one now, she is the only woman who knows how to hold a salon; she is the queen of Arcis. Madame Beauvisage has tried to make her refusal polite, that’s all.”

“I think that old Grevin was fooling your mother,” said Frederic Marest.

“Yesterday you attacked the Comte de Gondreville, you insulted and grievously affronted him, and he is to be consulted about your marriage to Cecile!”

“Pere Grevin is a sly old dog,” said Vinet.

“Madame Beauvisage is very ambitious,” pursued Antonin Goulard. “She knows very well her daughter is to have two millions; she means to be mother-in-law of a minister, or an ambassador, in order to play the great lady in Paris.”

“Well, why not?” said Simon Giguet.

“I wish you may get it!” replied the sub-prefect looking at Vinet, with whom he went off into a hearty laugh as soon as they were out of hearing. “He won’t even be deputy,” added Antonin, addressing Vinet; “the ministry have other views. You will find a letter from your father when you get home, enjoining you to make sure of the votes of all the persons in your department, and see that they go for the ministerial candidate. Your own promotion depends on this; and he requests you to be very discreet.”

“But who is the candidate for whom our ushers and sheriffs and clerks, and solicitors and notaries are to vote?” asked Vinet.

“The one I shall name to you.”

“How do you know my father has written to me, and what he wrote?”

“The stranger told me – ”

“The man after water?”

“My dear Vinet, you and I are not to know; we must treat him as a stranger. He saw your father at Provins as he came through. Just now this same man gave me a note from the prefect instructing me to follow in every particular the instructions of Comte Maxime about this election. I knew very well I should have a battle to fight! Come and dine somewhere and we will get out our batteries. You are to be *procureur-du-roi* at Mantes, and I am to be prefect; but we must *seem* to have nothing to do with the election, for don’t you see, we are between the hammer and the anvil. Simon is the candidate of a party which wants to overturn the present ministry and may succeed; but for men as intelligent as you and I there is but one course to take.”

“What is that?”

“To serve those who make and unmake ministers. A letter was shown to me from one of those personages who represent the stable and immovable thought of the State.”

Before going farther, it is necessary to explain who this Unknown person was, and what his purpose was in coming to Champagne.

XII. THE SALON OF MADAME D'ESPART

About two months before the nomination of Simon Giguet, at eleven o'clock one evening, in a mansion of the faubourg Saint-Honore belonging to the Marquise d'Espard, while tea was being served the Chevalier d'Espard, brother-in-law to the marquise, put down his tea-cup, and, looking round the circle, remarked: —

“Maxime was very melancholy to-night, – didn't you think so?”

“Yes,” replied Rastignac, “but his sadness is easily accounted for. He is forty-eight years old; at that age a man makes no new friends, and now that we have buried de Marsay, Maxime has lost the only man capable of understanding him, of being useful to him, and of using him.”

“He probably has pressing debts. Couldn't you put him in the way of paying them?” said the marquise to Rastignac.

At this period Rastignac was, for the second time, in the ministry; he had just been made count almost against his will. His father-in-law, the Baron de Nucingen, was peer of France, his younger brother a bishop, the Comte de Roche-Hugon, his brother-in-law, was an ambassador, and he himself was thought to be indispensable in all future combinations of the ministry.

“You always forget, my dear marquise,” replied Rastignac, “that our government exchanges its silver for gold only; it pays no heed to men.”

“Is Maxime a man who would blow out his brains?” inquired the banker du Tillet.

“Ha! you wish I were; we should be quits then,” said Comte Maxime de Trailles, whom everybody supposed to have left the house.

The count rose suddenly, like an apparition, from the depths of an arm-chair placed exactly behind that of the Chevalier d'Espard.

Every one present laughed.

“Will you have a cup of tea?” said the young Comtesse de Rastignac, whom the marquise had asked to do the honors in her place.

“Gladly,” replied the count, standing before the fireplace.

This man, the prince of fashionable scoundrels, had managed to maintain himself until now in the high and mighty position of a dandy in Paris, then called *Gants Jaunes* (lemon-kid-glovers), and since, “lions.” It is useless to relate the history of his youth, full of questionable adventures, with now and then some horrible drama, in which he had always known how to save appearances. To this man women were never anything else than a means; he believed no more in their griefs than he did in their joys; he regarded them, like the late de Marsay, as naughty children. After squandering his own fortune, he had spent that of a famous courtesan, La Belle Hollandaise, the mother of Esther Gobseck. He had caused the misery of Madame Restaud, sister of Madame Delphine de Nucingen, the mother of the young Comtesse de Rastignac.

The world of Paris offers many unimaginable situations. The Baronne de Nucingen was at this moment in Madame d'Espard's salon in presence of the author of all her sister's misery, in presence of a murderer who killed only the happiness of women. That, perhaps, was the reason why he was there. Madame de Nucingen had dined at Madame d'Espard's with her daughter, married a few months earlier to the Comte de Rastignac, who had begun his political career by occupying the post of under-secretary of state in the famous ministry of the late de Marsay, the only real statesman produced by the Revolution of July.

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