

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE TWO BROTHERS

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DEDICATION

**To Monsieur Charles Nodier,
member of the French Academy, etc**

Here, my dear Nodier, is a book filled with deeds that are screened from the action of the laws by the closed doors of domestic life; but as to which the finger of God, often called chance, supplies the place of human justice, and in which the moral is none the less striking and instructive because it is pointed by a scoffer.

To my mind, such deeds contain great lessons for the Family and for Maternity. We shall some day realize, perhaps too late, the effects produced by the diminution of paternal authority. That authority, which formerly ceased only at the death of the father, was the sole human tribunal before which domestic crimes could be arraigned; kings themselves, on special occasions, took part in executing its judgments. However good and tender a mother may be, she cannot fulfil the function of the

patriarchal royalty any more than a woman can take the place of a king upon the throne. Perhaps I have never drawn a picture that shows more plainly how essential to European society is the indissoluble marriage bond, how fatal the results of feminine weakness, how great the dangers arising from selfish interests when indulged without restraint. May a society which is based solely on the power of wealth shudder as it sees the impotence of the law in dealing with the workings of a system which deifies success, and pardons every means of attaining it. May it return to the Catholic religion, for the purification of its masses through the inspiration of religious feeling, and by means of an education other than that of a lay university.

In the “Scenes from Military Life” so many fine natures, so many high and noble self-devotions will be set forth, that I may here be allowed to point out the depraving effect of the necessities of war upon certain minds who venture to act in domestic life as if upon the field of battle.

You have cast a sagacious glance over the events of our own time; its philosophy shines, in more than one bitter reflection, through your elegant pages; you have appreciated, more clearly than other men, the havoc wrought in the mind of our country by the existence of four distinct political systems. I cannot, therefore, place this history under the protection of a more competent authority. Your name may, perhaps, defend my work against the criticisms that are certain to follow it, – for where is the patient who keeps silence when the surgeon lifts the dressing

from his wound?

To the pleasure of dedicating this Scene to you, is joined the pride I feel in thus making known your friendship for one who here subscribes himself

Your sincere admirer,

De Balzac

Paris, November, 1842.

CHAPTER I

In 1792 the townspeople of Issoudun enjoyed the services of a physician named Rouget, whom they held to be a man of consummate malignity. Were we to believe certain bold tongues, he made his wife extremely unhappy, although she was the most beautiful woman of the neighborhood. Perhaps, indeed, she was rather silly. But the prying of friends, the slander of enemies, and the gossip of acquaintances, had never succeeded in laying bare the interior of that household. Doctor Rouget was a man of whom we say in common parlance, "He is not pleasant to deal with." Consequently, during his lifetime, his townsmen kept silence about him and treated him civilly. His wife, a demoiselle Descoings, feeble in health during her girlhood (which was said to be a reason why the doctor married her), gave birth to a son, and also to a daughter who arrived, unexpectedly, ten years after her brother, and whose birth took the husband, doctor though he were, by surprise. This late-comer was named Agathe.

These little facts are so simple, so commonplace, that a writer seems scarcely justified in placing them in the fore-front of his history; yet if they are not known, a man of Doctor Rouget's stamp would be thought a monster, an unnatural father, when, in point of fact, he was only following out the evil tendencies which many people shelter under the terrible axiom that "men should have strength of character," – a masculine phrase that has caused

many a woman's misery.

The Descoings, father-in-law and mother-in-law of the doctor, were commission merchants in the wool-trade, and did a double business by selling for the producers and buying for the manufacturers of the golden fleeces of Berry; thus pocketing a commission on both sides. In this way they grew rich and miserly – the outcome of many such lives. Descoings the son, younger brother of Madame Rouget, did not like Issoudun. He went to seek his fortune in Paris, where he set up as a grocer in the rue Saint-Honore. That step led to his ruin. But nothing could have hindered it: a grocer is drawn to his business by an attracting force quite equal to the repelling force which drives artists away from it. We do not sufficiently study the social potentialities which make up the various vocations of life. It would be interesting to know what determines one man to be a stationer rather than a baker; since, in our day, sons are not compelled to follow the calling of their fathers, as they were among the Egyptians. In this instance, love decided the vocation of Descoings. He said to himself, "I, too, will be a grocer!" and in the same breath he said (also to himself) some other things regarding his employer, – a beautiful creature, with whom he had fallen desperately in love. Without other help than patience and the trifling sum of money his father and mother sent him, he married the widow of his predecessor, Monsieur Bixiou.

In 1792 Descoings was thought to be doing an excellent business. At that time, the old Descoings were still living. They

had retired from the wool-trade, and were employing their capital in buying up the forfeited estates, – another golden fleece! Their son-in-law Doctor Rouget, who, about this time, felt pretty sure that he should soon have to mourn for the death of his wife, sent his daughter to Paris to the care of his brother-in-law, partly to let her see the capital, but still more to carry out an artful scheme of his own. Descoings had no children. Madame Descoings, twelve years older than her husband, was in good health, but as fat as a thrush after harvest; and the canny Rouget knew enough professionally to be certain that Monsieur and Madame Descoings, contrary to the moral of fairy tales, would live happy ever after without having any children. The pair might therefore become attached to Agathe.

That young girl, the handsomest maiden in Issoudun, did not resemble either father or mother. Her birth had caused a lasting breach between Doctor Rouget and his intimate friend Monsieur Lousteau, a former sub-delegate who had lately removed from the town. When a family expatriates itself, the natives of a place as attractive as Issoudun have a right to inquire into the reasons of so surprising a step. It was said by certain sharp tongues that Doctor Rouget, a vindictive man, had been heard to exclaim that Monsieur Lousteau should die by his hand. Uttered by a physician, this declaration had the force of a cannon-ball. When the National Assembly suppressed the sub-delegates, Lousteau and his family left Issoudun, and never returned there. After their departure Madame Rouget spent most of her time with the

sister of the late sub-delegate, Madame Hochon, who was the godmother of her daughter, and the only person to whom she confided her griefs. The little that the good town of Issoudun ever really knew of the beautiful Madame Rouget was told by Madame Hochon, – though not until after the doctor's death.

The first words of Madame Rouget, when informed by her husband that he meant to send Agathe to Paris, were: "I shall never see my daughter again."

"And she was right," said the worthy Madame Hochon.

After this, the poor mother grew as yellow as a quince, and her appearance did not contradict the tongues of those who declared that Doctor Rouget was killing her by inches. The behavior of her booby of a son must have added to the misery of the poor woman so unjustly accused. Not restrained, possibly encouraged by his father, the young fellow, who was in every way stupid, paid her neither the attentions nor the respect which a son owes to a mother. Jean-Jacques Rouget was like his father, especially on the latter's worst side; and the doctor at his best was far from satisfactory, either morally or physically.

The arrival of the charming Agathe Rouget did not bring happiness to her uncle Descoings; for in the same week (or rather, we should say decade, for the Republic had then been proclaimed) he was imprisoned on a hint from Robespierre given to Fouquier-Tinville. Descoings, who was imprudent enough to think the famine fictitious, had the additional folly, under the impression that opinions were free, to express that opinion

to several of his male and female customers as he served them in the grocery. The citoyenne Duplay, wife of a cabinet-maker with whom Robespierre lodged, and who looked after the affairs of that eminent citizen, patronized, unfortunately, the Descoings establishment. She considered the opinions of the grocer insulting to Maximilian the First. Already displeased with the manners of Descoings, this illustrious “tricoteuse” of the Jacobin club regarded the beauty of his wife as a kind of aristocracy. She infused a venom of her own into the grocer’s remarks when she repeated them to her good and gentle master, and the poor man was speedily arrested on the well-worn charge of “accapuration.”

No sooner was he put in prison, than his wife set to work to obtain his release. But the steps she took were so ill-judged that any one hearing her talk to the arbiters of his fate might have thought that she was in reality seeking to get rid of him. Madame Descoings knew Bridau, one of the secretaries of Roland, then minister of the interior, – the right-hand man of all the ministers who succeeded each other in that office. She put Bridau on the war-path to save her grocer. That incorruptible official – one of the virtuous dupes who are always admirably disinterested – was careful not to corrupt the men on whom the fate of the poor grocer depended; on the contrary, he endeavored to enlighten them. Enlighten people in those days! As well might he have begged them to bring back the Bourbons. The Girondist minister, who was then contending against Robespierre, said

to his secretary, "Why do you meddle in the matter?" and all others to whom the worthy Bridau appealed made the same atrocious reply: "Why do you meddle?" Bridau then sagely advised Madame Descoings to keep quiet and await events. But instead of conciliating Robespierre's housekeeper, she fretted and fumed against that informer, and even complained to a member of the Convention, who, trembling for himself, replied hastily, "I will speak of it to Robespierre." The handsome petitioner put faith in this promise, which the other carefully forgot. A few loaves of sugar, or a bottle or two of good liqueur, given to the citoyenne Duplay would have saved Descoings.

This little mishap proves that in revolutionary times it is quite as dangerous to employ honest men as scoundrels; we should rely on ourselves alone. Descoings perished; but he had the glory of going to the scaffold with Andre Chenier. There, no doubt, grocery and poetry embraced for the first time in the flesh; although they have, and ever have had, intimate secret relations. The death of Descoings produced far more sensation than that of Andre Chenier. It has taken thirty years to prove to France that she lost more by the death of Chenier than by that of Descoings.

This act of Robespierre led to one good result: the terrified grocers let politics alone until 1830. Descoings's shop was not a hundred yards from Robespierre's lodging. His successor was scarcely more fortunate than himself. Cesar Birotteau, the celebrated perfumer of the "Queen of Roses," bought the premises; but, as if the scaffold had left some inexplicable

contagion behind it, the inventor of the “Paste of Sultans” and the “Carminative Balm” came to his ruin in that very shop. The solution of the problem here suggested belongs to the realm of occult science.

During the visits which Roland’s secretary paid to the unfortunate Madame Descoings, he was struck with the cold, calm, innocent beauty of Agathe Rouget. While consoling the widow, who, however, was too inconsolable to carry on the business of her second deceased husband, he married the charming girl, with the consent of her father, who hastened to give his approval to the match. Doctor Rouget, delighted to hear that matters were going beyond his expectations, – for his wife, on the death of her brother, had become sole heiress of the Descoings, – rushed to Paris, not so much to be present at the wedding as to see that the marriage contract was drawn to suit him. The ardent and disinterested love of citizen Bridau gave carte blanche to the perfidious doctor, who made the most of his son-in-law’s blindness, as the following history will show.

Madame Rouget, or, to speak more correctly, the doctor, inherited all the property, landed and personal, of Monsieur and Madame Descoings the elder, who died within two years of each other; and soon after that, Rouget got the better, as we may say, of his wife, for she died at the beginning of the year 1799. So he had vineyards and he bought farms, he owned iron-works and he sold fleeces. His well-beloved son was stupidly incapable of doing anything; but the father destined him for the state in life

of a land proprietor and allowed him to grow up in wealth and silliness, certain that the lad would know as much as the wisest if he simply let himself live and die. After 1799, the cipherers of Issoudun put, at the very least, thirty thousand francs' income to the doctor's credit. From the time of his wife's death he led a debauched life, though he regulated it, so to speak, and kept it within the closed doors of his own house. This man, endowed with "strength of character," died in 1805, and God only knows what the townspeople of Issoudun said about him then, and how many anecdotes they related of his horrible private life. Jean-Jacques Rouget, whom his father, recognizing his stupidity, had latterly treated with severity, remained a bachelor for certain reasons, the explanation of which will form an important part of this history. His celibacy was partly his father's fault, as we shall see later.

Meantime, it is well to inquire into the results of the secret vengeance the doctor took on a daughter whom he did not recognize as his own, but who, you must understand at once, was legitimately his. Not a person in Issoudun had noticed one of those capricious facts that make the whole subject of generation a vast abyss in which science flounders. Agathe bore a strong likeness to the mother of Doctor Rouget. Just as gout is said to skip a generation and pass from grandfather to grandson, resemblances not uncommonly follow the same course.

In like manner, the eldest of Agathe's children, who physically resembled his mother, had the moral qualities of his grandfather,

Doctor Rouget. We will leave the solution of this problem to the twentieth century, with a fine collection of microscopic animalculæ; our descendants may perhaps write as much nonsense as the scientific schools of the nineteenth century have uttered on this mysterious and perplexing question.

Agathe Rouget attracted the admiration of everyone by a face destined, like that of Mary, the mother of our Lord, to continue ever virgin, even after marriage. Her portrait, still to be seen in the atelier of Bridau, shows a perfect oval and a clear whiteness of complexion, without the faintest tinge of color, in spite of her golden hair. More than one artist, looking at the pure brow, the discreet, composed mouth, the delicate nose, the small ears, the long lashes, and the dark-blue eyes filled with tenderness, – in short, at the whole countenance expressive of placidity, – has asked the great artist, “Is that a copy of a Raphael?” No man ever acted under a truer inspiration than the minister’s secretary when he married this young girl. Agathe was an embodiment of the ideal housekeeper brought up in the provinces and never parted from her mother. Pious, though far from sanctimonious, she had no other education than that given to women by the Church. Judged, by ordinary standards, she was an accomplished wife, yet her ignorance of life paved the way for great misfortunes. The epitaph on the Roman matron, “She did needlework and kept the house,” gives a faithful picture of her simple, pure, and tranquil existence.

Under the Consulate, Bridau attached himself fanatically to

Napoleon, who placed him at the head of a department in the ministry of the interior in 1804, a year before the death of Doctor Rouget. With a salary of twelve thousand francs and very handsome emoluments, Bridau was quite indifferent to the scandalous settlement of the property at Issoudun, by which Agathe was deprived of her rightful inheritance. Six months before Doctor Rouget's death he had sold one-half of his property to his son, to whom the other half was bequeathed as a gift, and also in accordance with his rights as heir. An advance of fifty thousand francs on her inheritance, made to Agathe at the time of her marriage, represented her share of the property of her father and mother.

Bridau idolized the Emperor, and served him with the devotion of a Mohammedan for his prophet; striving to carry out the vast conceptions of the modern demi-god, who, finding the whole fabric of France destroyed, went to work to reconstruct everything. The new official never showed fatigue, never cried "Enough." Projects, reports, notes, studies, he accepted all, even the hardest labors, happy in the consciousness of aiding his Emperor. He loved him as a man, he adored him as a sovereign, and he would never allow the least criticism of his acts or his purposes.

From 1804 to 1808, the Bridaus lived in a handsome suite of rooms on the Quai Voltaire, a few steps from the ministry of the interior and close to the Tuileries. A cook and footman were the only servants of the household during this period of

Madame Bridau's grandeur. Agathe, early afoot, went to market with her cook. While the latter did the rooms, she prepared the breakfast. Bridau never went to the ministry before eleven o'clock. As long as their union lasted, his wife took the same unwearying pleasure in preparing for him an exquisite breakfast, the only meal he really enjoyed. At all seasons and in all weathers, Agathe watched her husband from the window as he walked toward his office, and never drew in her head until she had seen him turn the corner of the rue du Bac. Then she cleared the breakfast-table herself, gave an eye to the arrangement of the rooms, dressed for the day, played with her children and took them to walk, or received the visits of friends; all the while waiting in spirit for Bridau's return. If her husband brought him important business that had to be attended to, she would station herself close to the writing-table in his study, silent as a statue, knitting while he wrote, sitting up as late as he did, and going to bed only a few moments before him. Occasionally, the pair went to some theatre, occupying one of the ministerial boxes. On those days, they dined at a restaurant, and the gay scenes of that establishment never ceased to give Madame Bridau the same lively pleasure they afford to provincials who are new to Paris. Agathe, who was obliged to accept the formal dinners sometimes given to the head of a department in a ministry, paid due attention to the luxurious requirements of the then mode of dress, but she took off the rich apparel with delight when she returned home, and resumed the simple garb of a provincial. One day in the

week, Thursday, Bridau received his friends, and he also gave a grand ball, annually, on Shrove Tuesday.

These few words contain the whole history of their conjugal life, which had but three events; the births of two children, born three years apart, and the death of Bridau, who died in 1808, killed by overwork at the very moment when the Emperor was about to appoint him director-general, count, and councillor of state. At this period of his reign, Napoleon was particularly absorbed in the affairs of the interior; he overwhelmed Bridau with work, and finally wrecked the health of that dauntless bureaucrat. The Emperor, of whom Bridau had never asked a favor, made inquiries into his habits and fortune. Finding that this devoted servant literally had nothing but his situation, Napoleon recognized him as one of the incorruptible natures which raised the character of his government and gave moral weight to it, and he wished to surprise him by the gift of some distinguished reward. But the effort to complete a certain work, involving immense labor, before the departure of the Emperor for Spain caused the death of the devoted servant, who was seized with an inflammatory fever. When the Emperor, who remained in Paris for a few days after his return to prepare for the campaign of 1809, was told of Bridau's death he said: "There are men who can never be replaced." Struck by the spectacle of a devotion which could receive none of the brilliant recognitions that reward a soldier, the Emperor resolved to create an order to requite civil services, just as he had already created the Legion of honor

to reward the military. The impression he received from the death of Bridau led him to plan the order of the Reunion. He had not time, however, to mature this aristocratic scheme, the recollection of which is now so completely effaced that many of my readers may ask what were its insignia: the order was worn with a blue ribbon. The Emperor called it the Reunion, under the idea of uniting the order of the Golden Fleece of Spain with the order of the Golden Fleece of Austria. "Providence," said a Prussian diplomatist, "took care to frustrate the profanation."

After Bridau's death the Emperor inquired into the circumstances of his widow. Her two sons each received a scholarship in the Imperial Lyceum, and the Emperor paid the whole costs of their education from his privy purse. He gave Madame Bridau a pension of four thousand francs, intending, no doubt, to advance the fortune of her sons in future years.

From the time of her marriage to the death of her husband, Agathe had held no communication with Issoudun. She lost her mother just as she was on the point of giving birth to her youngest son, and when her father, who, as she well knew, loved her little, died, the coronation of the Emperor was at hand, and that event gave Bridau so much additional work that she was unwilling to leave him. Her brother, Jean-Jacques Rouget, had not written to her since she left Issoudun. Though grieved by the tacit repudiation of her family, Agathe had come to think seldom of those who never thought of her. Once a year she received a letter from her godmother, Madame Hochon, to whom she

replied with commonplaces, paying no heed to the advice which that pious and excellent woman gave to her, disguised in cautious words.

Some time before the death of Doctor Rouget, Madame Hochon had written to her goddaughter warning her that she would get nothing from her father's estate unless she gave a power of attorney to Monsieur Hochon. Agathe was very reluctant to harass her brother. Whether it were that Bridau thought the spoliation of his wife in accordance with the laws and customs of Berry, or that, high-minded as he was, he shared the magnanimity of his wife, certain it is that he would not listen to Roguin, his notary, who advised him to take advantage of his ministerial position to contest the deeds by which the father had deprived the daughter of her legitimate inheritance. Husband and wife thus tacitly sanctioned what was done at Issoudun. Nevertheless, Roguin had forced Bridau to reflect upon the future interests of his wife which were thus compromised. He saw that if he died before her, Agathe would be left without property, and this led him to look into his own affairs. He found that between 1793 and 1805 his wife and he had been obliged to use nearly thirty thousand of the fifty thousand francs in cash which old Rouget had given to his daughter at the time of her marriage. He at once invested the remaining twenty thousand in the public funds, then quoted at forty, and from this source Agathe received about two thousand francs a year. As a widow, Madame Bridau could live suitably on an income of six thousand

francs. With provincial good sense, she thought of changing her residence, dismissing the footman, and keeping no servant except a cook; but her intimate friend, Madame Descoings, who insisted on being considered her aunt, sold her own establishment and came to live with Agathe, turning the study of the late Bridau into her bedroom.

The two widows clubbed their revenues, and so were in possession of a joint income of twelve thousand francs a year. This seems a very simple and natural proceeding. But nothing in life is more deserving of attention than the things that are called natural; we are on our guard against the unnatural and extraordinary. For this reason, you will find men of experience – lawyers, judges, doctors, and priests – attaching immense importance to simple matters; and they are often thought over-scrupulous. But the serpent amid flowers is one of the finest myths that antiquity has bequeathed for the guidance of our lives. How often we hear fools, trying to excuse themselves in their own eyes or in the eyes of others, exclaiming, “It was all so natural that any one would have been taken in.”

In 1809, Madame Descoings, who never told her age, was sixty-five. In her heyday she had been popularly called a beauty, and was now one of those rare women whom time respects. She owed to her excellent constitution the privilege of preserving her good looks, which, however, would not bear close examination. She was of medium height, plump, and fresh, with fine shoulders and a rather rosy complexion. Her blond hair, bordering on

chestnut, showed, in spite of her husband's catastrophe, not a tinge of gray. She loved good cheer, and liked to concoct nice little made dishes; yet, fond as she was of eating, she also adored the theatre and cherished a vice which she wrapped in impenetrable mystery – she bought into lotteries. Can that be the abyss of which mythology warns us under the fable of the Danaïdes and their cask? Madame Descoings, like other women who are lucky enough to keep young for many years, spend rather too much upon her dress; but aside from these trifling defects she was the pleasantest of women to live with. Of every one's opinion, never opposing anybody, her kindly and communicative gayety gave pleasure to all. She had, moreover, a Parisian quality which charmed the retired clerks and elderly merchants of her circle, – she could take and give a jest. If she did not marry a third time it was no doubt the fault of the times. During the wars of the Empire, marrying men found rich and handsome girls too easily to trouble themselves about women of sixty.

Madame Descoings, always anxious to cheer Madame Bridau, often took the latter to the theatre, or to drive; prepared excellent little dinners for her delectation, and even tried to marry her to her own son by her first husband, Bixiou. Alas! to do this, she was forced to reveal a terrible secret, carefully kept by her, by her late husband, and by her notary. The young and beautiful Madame Descoings, who passed for thirty-six years old, had a son who was thirty-five, named Bixiou, already a widower, a major in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry, who subsequently perished at Lutzen,

leaving behind him an only son. Madame Descoings, who only saw her grandson secretly, gave out that he was the son of the first wife of her first husband. The revelation was partly a prudential act; for this grandson was being educated with Madame Bridau's sons at the Imperial Lyceum, where he had a half-scholarship. The lad, who was clever and shrewd at school, soon after made himself a great reputation as draughtsman and designer, and also as a wit.

Agathe, who lived only for her children, declined to re-marry, as much from good sense as from fidelity to her husband. But it is easier for a woman to be a good wife than to be a good mother. A widow has two tasks before her, whose duties clash: she is a mother, and yet she must exercise parental authority. Few women are firm enough to understand and practise this double duty. Thus it happened that Agathe, notwithstanding her many virtues, was the innocent cause of great unhappiness. In the first place, through her lack of intelligence and the blind confidence to which such noble natures are prone, Agathe fell a victim to Madame Descoings, who brought a terrible misfortune on the family. That worthy soul was nursing up a combination of three numbers called a "trey" in a lottery, and lotteries give no credit to their customers. As manager of the joint household, she was able to pay up her stakes with the money intended for their current expenses, and she went deeper and deeper into debt, with the hope of ultimately enriching her grandson Bixiou, her dear Agathe, and the little Bridaus. When the debts amounted

to ten thousand francs, she increased her stakes, trusting that her favorite trey, which had not turned up in nine years, would come at last, and fill to overflowing the abysmal deficit.

From that moment the debt rolled up rapidly. When it reached twenty thousand francs, Madame Descoings lost her head, still failing to win the trey. She tried to mortgage her own property to pay her niece, but Roguin, who was her notary, showed her the impossibility of carrying out that honorable intention. The late Doctor Rouget had laid hold of the property of the brother-in-law after the grocer's execution, and had, as it were, disinherited Madame Descoings by securing to her a life-interest on the property of his own son, Jean-Jacques Rouget. No money-lender would think of advancing twenty thousand francs to a woman sixty-six years of age, on an annuity of about four thousand, at a period when ten per cent could easily be got for an investment. So one morning Madame Descoings fell at the feet of her niece, and with sobs confessed the state of things. Madame Bridau did not reproach her; she sent away the footman and cook, sold all but the bare necessities of her furniture, sold also three-fourths of her government funds, paid off the debts, and bade farewell to her *appartement*.

CHAPTER II

One of the worst corners in all Paris is undoubtedly that part of the rue Mazarin which lies between the rue Guenegard and its junction with the rue de Seine, behind the palace of the Institute. The high gray walls of the college and of the library which Cardinal Mazarin presented to the city of Paris, and which the French Academy was in after days to inhabit, cast chill shadows over this angle of the street, where the sun seldom shines, and the north wind blows. The poor ruined widow came to live on the third floor of a house standing at this damp, dark, cold corner. Opposite, rose the Institute buildings, in which were the dens of ferocious animals known to the bourgeoisie under the name of artists, – under that of tyro, or rapin, in the studios. Into these dens they enter rapins, but they may come forth prix de Rome. The transformation does not take place without extraordinary uproar and disturbance at the time of year when the examinations are going on, and the competitors are shut up in their cells. To win a prize, they were obliged, within a given time, to make, if a sculptor, a clay model; if a painter, a picture such as may be seen at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; if a musician, a cantata; if an architect, the plans for a public building. At the time when we are penning the words, this menagerie has already been removed from these cold and cheerless buildings, and taken to the elegant Palais des Beaux-Arts, which stands near by.

From the windows of Madame Bridau's new abode, a glance could penetrate the depths of those melancholy barred cages. To the north, the view was shut in by the dome of the Institute; looking up the street, the only distraction to the eye was a file of hackney-coaches, which stood at the upper end of the rue Mazarin. After a while, the widow put boxes of earth in front of her windows, and cultivated those aerial gardens that police regulations forbid, though their vegetable products purify the atmosphere. The house, which backed up against another fronting on the rue de Seine, was necessarily shallow, and the staircase wound round upon itself. The third floor was the last. Three windows to three rooms, namely, a dining-room, a small salon, and a chamber on one side of the landing; on the other, a little kitchen, and two single rooms; above, an immense garret without partitions. Madame Bridau chose this lodging for three reasons: economy, for it cost only four hundred francs a year, so that she took a lease of it for nine years; proximity to her sons' school, the Imperial Lyceum being at a short distance; thirdly, because it was in the quarter to which she was used.

The inside of the *appartement* was in keeping with the general look of the house. The dining-room, hung with a yellow paper covered with little green flowers, and floored with tiles that were not glazed, contained nothing that was not strictly necessary, — namely, a table, two sideboards, and six chairs, brought from the other *appartement*. The salon was adorned with an Aubusson carpet given to Bridau when the ministry of the interior was

refurnished. To the furniture of this room the widow added one of those commonplace mahogany sofas with the Egyptian heads that Jacob Desmaltre manufactured by the gross in 1806, covering them with a silken green stuff bearing a design of white geometric circles. Above this piece of furniture hung a portrait of Bridau, done in pastel by the hand of an amateur, which at once attracted the eye. Though art might have something to say against it, no one could fail to recognize the firmness of the noble and obscure citizen upon that brow. The serenity of the eyes, gentle, yet proud, was well given; the sagacious mind, to which the prudent lips bore testimony, the frank smile, the atmosphere of the man of whom the Emperor had said, "*Justum et tenacem*," had all been caught, if not with talent, at least with fidelity. Studying that face, an observer could see that the man had done his duty. His countenance bore signs of the incorruptibility which we attribute to several men who served the Republic. On the opposite wall, over a card-table, flashed a picture of the Emperor in brilliant colors, done by Vernet; Napoleon was riding rapidly, attended by his escort.

Agathe had bestowed upon herself two large birdcages; one filled with canaries, the other with Java sparrows. She had given herself up to this juvenile fancy since the loss of her husband, irreparable to her, as, in fact, it was to many others. By the end of three months, her widowed chamber had become what it was destined to remain until the appointed day when she left it forever, – a litter of confusion which words are powerless

to describe. Cats were domiciled on the sofa. The canaries, occasionally let loose, left their commas on the furniture. The poor dear woman scattered little heaps of millet and bits of chickweed about the room, and put tidbits for the cats in broken saucers. Garments lay everywhere. The room breathed of the provinces and of constancy. Everything that once belonged to Bridau was scrupulously preserved. Even the implements in his desk received the care which the widow of a paladin might have bestowed upon her husband's armor. One slight detail here will serve to bring the tender devotion of this woman before the reader's mind. She had wrapped up a pen and sealed the package, on which she wrote these words, "Last pen used by my dear husband." The cup from which he drank his last draught was on the fireplace; caps and false hair were tossed, at a later period, over the glass globes which covered these precious relics. After Bridau's death not a trace of coquetry, not even a woman's ordinary care of her person, was left in the young widow of thirty-five. Parted from the only man she had ever known, esteemed, and loved, from one who had never caused her the slightest unhappiness, she was no longer conscious of her womanhood; all things were as nothing to her; she no longer even thought of her dress. Nothing was ever more simply done or more complete than this laying down of conjugal happiness and personal charm. Some human beings obtain through love the power of transferring their self – their I – to the being of another; and when death takes that other, no life of their own is possible

for them.

Agathe, who now lived only for her children, was infinitely sad at the thought of the privations this financial ruin would bring upon them. From the time of her removal to the rue Mazarin a shade of melancholy came upon her face, which made it very touching. She hoped a little in the Emperor; but the Emperor at that time could do no more than he was already doing; he was giving three hundred francs a year to each child from his privy purse, besides the scholarships.

As for the brilliant Descoings, she occupied an *appartement* on the second floor similar to that of her niece above her. She had made Madame Bridau an assignment of three thousand francs out of her annuity. Roguin, the notary, attended to this in Madame Bridau's interest; but it would take seven years of such slow repayment to make good the loss. The Descoings, thus reduced to an income of twelve hundred francs, lived with her niece in a small way. These excellent but timid creatures employed a woman-of-all-work for the morning hours only. Madame Descoings, who liked to cook, prepared the dinner. In the evenings a few old friends, persons employed at the ministry who owed their places to Bridau, came for a game of cards with the two widows. Madame Descoings still cherished her trey, which she declared was obstinate about turning up. She expected, by one grand stroke, to repay the enforced loan she had made upon her niece. She was fonder of the little Bridaus than she was of her grandson Bixiou, – partly from a sense of the

wrong she had done them, partly because she felt the kindness of her niece, who, under her worst deprivations, never uttered a word of reproach. So Philippe and Joseph were cosseted, and the old gambler in the Imperial Lottery of France (like others who have a vice or a weakness to atone for) cooked them nice little dinners with plenty of sweets. Later on, Philippe and Joseph could extract from her pocket, with the utmost facility, small sums of money, which the younger used for pencils, paper, charcoal and prints, the elder to buy tennis-shoes, marbles, twine, and pocket-knives. Madame Descoings's passion forced her to be content with fifty francs a month for her domestic expenses, so as to gamble with the rest.

On the other hand, Madame Bridau, motherly love, kept her expenses down to the same sum. By way of penance for her former over-confidence, she heroically cut off her own little enjoyments. As with other timid souls of limited intelligence, one shock to her feelings rousing her distrust led her to exaggerate a defect in her character until it assumed the consistency of a virtue. The Emperor, she said to herself, might forget them; he might die in battle; her pension, at any rate, ceased with her life. She shuddered at the risk her children ran of being left alone in the world without means. Quite incapable of understanding Roguin when he explained to her that in seven years Madame Descoings's assignment would replace the money she had sold out of the Funds, she persisted in trusting neither the notary nor her aunt, nor even the government; she believed in nothing but

herself and the privations she was practising. By laying aside three thousand francs every year from her pension, she would have thirty thousand francs at the end of ten years; which would give fifteen hundred a year to her children. At thirty-six, she might expect to live twenty years longer; and if she kept to the same system of economy she might leave to each child enough for the bare necessities of life.

Thus the two widows passed from hollow opulence to voluntary poverty, – one under the pressure of a vice, the other through the promptings of the purest virtue. None of these petty details are useless in teaching the lesson which ought to be learned from this present history, drawn as it is from the most commonplace interests of life, but whose bearings are, it may be, only the more widespread. The view from the windows into the student dens; the tumult of the rapins below; the necessity of looking up at the sky to escape the miserable sights of the damp angle of the street; the presence of that portrait, full of soul and grandeur despite the workmanship of an amateur painter; the sight of the rich colors, now old and harmonious, in that calm and placid home; the preference of the mother for her eldest child; her opposition to the tastes of the younger; in short, the whole body of facts and circumstances which make the preamble of this history are perhaps the generating causes to which we owe Joseph Bridau, one of the greatest painters of the modern French school of art.

Philippe, the elder of the two sons, was strikingly like his

mother. Though a blond lad, with blue eyes, he had the daring look which is readily taken for intrepidity and courage. Old Claparon, who entered the ministry of the interior at the same time as Bridau, and was one of the faithful friends who played whist every night with the two widows, used to say of Philippe two or three times a month, giving him a tap on the cheek, "Here's a young rascal who'll stand to his guns!" The boy, thus stimulated, naturally and out of bravado, assumed a resolute manner. That turn once given to his character, he became very adroit at all bodily exercises; his fights at the Lyceum taught him the endurance and contempt for pain which lays the foundation of military valor. He also acquired, very naturally, a distaste for study; public education being unable to solve the difficult problem of developing "pari passu" the body and the mind.

Agathe believed that the purely physical resemblance which Philippe bore to her carried with it a moral likeness; and she confidently expected him to show at a future day her own delicacy of feeling, heightened by the vigor of manhood. Philippe was fifteen years old when his mother moved into the melancholy *appartement* in the rue Mazarin; and the winning ways of a lad of that age went far to confirm the maternal beliefs. Joseph, three years younger, was like his father, but only on the defective side. In the first place, his thick black hair was always in disorder, no matter what pains were taken with it; while Philippe's, notwithstanding his vivacity, was invariably neat. Then, by some mysterious fatality, Joseph could not keep his clothes clean; dress

him in new clothes, and he immediately made them look like old ones. The elder, on the other hand, took care of his things out of mere vanity. Unconsciously, the mother acquired a habit of scolding Joseph and holding up his brother as an example to him. Agathe did not treat the two children alike; when she went to fetch them from school, the thought in her mind as to Joseph always was, "What sort of state shall I find him in?" These trifles drove her heart into the gulf of maternal preference.

No one among the very ordinary persons who made the society of the two widows – neither old Du Bruel nor old Claparon, nor Desroches the father, nor even the Abbe Loraux, Agathe's confessor – noticed Joseph's faculty for observation. Absorbed in the line of his own tastes, the future colorist paid no attention to anything that concerned himself. During his childhood this disposition was so like torpor that his father grew uneasy about him. The remarkable size of the head and the width of the brow roused a fear that the child might be liable to water on the brain. His distressful face, whose originality was thought ugliness by those who had no eye for the moral value of a countenance, wore rather a sullen expression during his childhood. The features, which developed later in life, were pinched, and the close attention the child paid to what went on about him still further contracted them. Philippe flattered his mother's vanity, but Joseph won no compliments. Philippe sparkled with the clever sayings and lively answers that lead parents to believe their boys will turn out remarkable men;

Joseph was taciturn, and a dreamer. The mother hoped great things of Philippe, and expected nothing of Joseph.

Joseph's predilection for art was developed by a very commonplace incident. During the Easter holidays of 1812, as he was coming home from a walk in the Tuileries with his brother and Madame Descoings, he saw a pupil drawing a caricature of some professor on the wall of the Institute, and stopped short with admiration at the charcoal sketch, which was full of satire. The next day the child stood at the window watching the pupils as they entered the building by the door on the rue Mazarin; then he ran downstairs and slipped furtively into the long courtyard of the Institute, full of statues, busts, half-finished marbles, plasters, and baked clays; at all of which he gazed feverishly, for his instinct was awakened, and his vocation stirred within him. He entered a room on the ground-floor, the door of which was half open; and there he saw a dozen young men drawing from a statue, who at once began to make fun of him.

"Hi! little one," cried the first to see him, taking the crumbs of his bread and scattering them at the child.

"Whose child is he?"

"Goodness, how ugly!"

For a quarter of an hour Joseph stood still and bore the brunt of much teasing in the atelier of the great sculptor, Chaudet. But after laughing at him for a time, the pupils were struck with his persistency and with the expression of his face. They asked him what he wanted. Joseph answered that he wished to know

how to draw; thereupon they all encouraged him. Won by such friendliness, the child told them he was Madame Bridau's son.

"Oh! if you are Madame Bridau's son," they cried, from all parts of the room, "you will certainly be a great man. Long live the son of Madame Bridau! Is your mother pretty? If you are a sample of her, she must be stylish!"

"Ha! you want to be an artist?" said the eldest pupil, coming up to Joseph, "but don't you know that that requires pluck; you'll have to bear all sorts of trials, – yes, trials, – enough to break your legs and arms and soul and body. All the fellows you see here have gone through regular ordeals. That one, for instance, he went seven days without eating! Let me see, now, if you can be an artist."

He took one of the child's arms and stretched it straight up in the air; then he placed the other arm as if Joseph were in the act of delivering a blow with his fist.

"Now that's what we call the telegraph trial," said the pupil. "If you can stand like that, without lowering or changing the position of your arms for a quarter of an hour, then you'll have proved yourself a plucky one."

"Courage, little one, courage!" cried all the rest. "You must suffer if you want to be an artist."

Joseph, with the good faith of his thirteen years, stood motionless for five minutes, all the pupils gazing solemnly at him.

"There! you are moving," cried one.

"Steady, steady, confound you!" cried another.

“The Emperor Napoleon stood a whole month as you see him there,” said a third, pointing to the fine statue by Chaudet, which was in the room.

That statue, which represents the Emperor standing with the Imperial sceptre in his hand, was torn down in 1814 from the column it surmounted so well.

At the end of ten minutes the sweat stood in drops on Joseph’s forehead. At that moment a bald-headed little man, pale and sickly in appearance, entered the atelier, where respectful silence reigned at once.

“What you are about, you urchins?” he exclaimed, as he looked at the youthful martyr.

“That is a good little fellow, who is posing,” said the tall pupil who had placed Joseph.

“Are you not ashamed to torture a poor child in that way?” said Chaudet, lowering Joseph’s arms. “How long have you been standing there?” he asked the boy, giving him a friendly little pat on the cheek.

“A quarter of an hour.”

“What brought you here?”

“I want to be an artist.”

“Where do you belong? where do you come from?”

“From mamma’s house.”

“Oh! mamma!” cried the pupils.

“Silence at the easels!” cried Chaudet. “Who is your mamma?”

“She is Madame Bridau. My papa, who is dead, was a friend of the Emperor; and if you will teach me to draw, the Emperor will pay all you ask for it.”

“His father was head of a department at the ministry of the Interior,” exclaimed Chaudet, struck by a recollection. “So you want to be an artist, at your age?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Well, come here just as much as you like; we’ll amuse you. Give him a board, and paper, and chinks, and let him alone. You are to know, you young scamps, that his father did me a service. Here, Corde-a-puits, go and get some cakes and sugar-plums,” he said to the pupil who had tortured Joseph, giving him some small change. “We’ll see if you are to be artist by the way you gobble up the dainties,” added the sculptor, chucking Joseph under the chin.

Then he went round examining the pupils’ works, followed by the child, who looked and listened, and tried to understand him. The sweets were brought, Chaudet, himself, the child, and the whole studio all had their teeth in them; and Joseph was petted quite as much as he had been teased. The whole scene, in which the rough play and real heart of artists were revealed, and which the boy instinctively understood, made a great impression on his mind. The apparition of the sculptor, – for whom the Emperor’s protection opened a way to future glory, closed soon after by his premature death, – was like a vision to little Joseph. The child said nothing to his mother about this adventure, but he spent

two hours every Sunday and every Thursday in Chaudet's atelier. From that time forth, Madame Descoings, who humored the fancies of the two cherubim, kept Joseph supplied with pencils and red chalks, prints and drawing-paper. At school, the future colorist sketched his masters, drew his comrades, charcoaled the dormitories, and showed surprising assiduity in the drawing-class. Lemire, the drawing-master, struck not only with the lad's inclination but also with his actual progress, came to tell Madame Bridau of her son's faculty. Agathe, like a true provincial, who knows as little of art as she knows much of housekeeping, was terrified. When Lemire left her, she burst into tears.

"Ah!" she cried, when Madame Descoings went to ask what was the matter. "What is to become of me! Joseph, whom I meant to make a government clerk, whose career was all marked out for him at the ministry of the interior, where, protected by his father's memory, he might have risen to be chief of a division before he was twenty-five, he, my boy, he wants to be a painter, — a vagabond! I always knew that child would give me nothing but trouble."

Madame Descoings confessed that for several months past she had encouraged Joseph's passion, aiding and abetting his Sunday and Thursday visits to the Institute. At the Salon, to which she had taken him, the little fellow had shown an interest in the pictures, which was, she declared, nothing short of miraculous.

"If he understands painting at thirteen, my dear," she said, "your Joseph will be a man of genius."

“Yes; and see what genius did for his father, – killed him with overwork at forty!”

At the close of autumn, just as Joseph was entering his fourteenth year, Agathe, contrary to Madame Descoings’s entreaties, went to see Chaudet, and requested that he would cease to debauch her son. She found the sculptor in a blue smock, modelling his last statue; he received the widow of the man who formerly had served him at a critical moment, rather roughly; but, already at death’s door, he was struggling with passionate ardor to do in a few hours work he could hardly have accomplished in several months. As Madame Bridau entered, he had just found an effect long sought for, and was handling his tools and clay with spasmodic jerks and movements that seemed to the ignorant Agathe like those of a maniac. At any other time Chaudet would have laughed; but now, as he heard the mother bewailing the destiny he had opened to her child, abusing art, and insisting that Joseph should no longer be allowed to enter the atelier, he burst into a holy wrath.

“I was under obligations to your deceased husband, I wished to help his son, to watch his first steps in the noblest of all careers,” he cried. “Yes, madame, learn, if you do not know it, that a great artist is a king, and more than a king; he is happier, he is independent, he lives as he likes, he reigns in the world of fancy. Your son has a glorious future before him. Faculties like his are rare; they are only disclosed at his age in such beings as the Giottoes, Raphaels, Titians, Rubens, Murillos, – for, in

my opinion, he will make a better painter than sculptor. God of heaven! if I had such a son, I should be as happy as the Emperor is to have given himself the King of Rome. Well, you are mistress of your child's fate. Go your own way, madame; make him a fool, a miserable quill-driver, tie him to a desk, and you've murdered him! But I hope, in spite of all your efforts, that he will stay an artist. A true vocation is stronger than all the obstacles that can be opposed to it. Vocation! why the very word means a call; ay, the election of God himself! You will make your child unhappy, that's all." He flung the clay he no longer needed violently into a tub, and said to his model, "That will do for to-day."

Agathe raised her eyes and saw, in a corner of the atelier where her glance had not before penetrated, a nude woman sitting on a stool, the sight of whom drove her away horrified.

"You are not to have the little Bridau here any more," said Chaudet to his pupils, "it annoys his mother."

"Eugh!" they all cried, as Agathe closed the door.

No sooner did the students of sculpture and painting find out that Madame Bridau did not wish her son to be an artist, than their whole happiness centred on getting Joseph among them. In spite of a promise not to go to the Institute which his mother exacted from him, the child often slipped into Regnauld the painter's studio, where he was encouraged to daub canvas. When the widow complained that the bargain was not kept, Chaudet's pupils assured her that Regnauld was not Chaudet, and they hadn't the bringing up of her son, with other impertinences; and

the atrocious young scamps composed a song with a hundred and thirty-seven couplets on Madame Bridau.

On the evening of that sad day Agathe refused to play at cards, and sat on her sofa plunged in such grief that the tears stood in her handsome eyes.

“What is the matter, Madame Bridau?” asked old Claparon.

“She thinks her boy will have to beg his bread because he has got the bump of painting,” said Madame Descoings; “but, for my part, I am not the least uneasy about the future of my stepson, little Bixiou, who has a passion for drawing. Men are born to get on.”

“You are right,” said the hard and severe Desroches, who, in spite of his talents, had never himself got on in the position of assistant-head of a department. “Happily I have only one son; otherwise, with my eighteen hundred francs a year, and a wife who makes barely twelve hundred out of her stamped-paper office, I don’t know what would become of me. I have just placed my boy as under-clerk to a lawyer; he gets twenty-five francs a month and his breakfast. I give him as much more, and he dines and sleeps at home. That’s all he gets; he must manage for himself, but he’ll make his way. I keep the fellow harder at work than if he were at school, and some day he will be a barrister. When I give him money to go to the theatre, he is as happy as a king and kisses me. Oh, I keep a tight hand on him, and he renders me an account of all he spends. You are too good to your children, Madame Bridau; if your son wants to go through

hardships and privations, let him; they'll make a man of him."

"As for my boy," said Du Bruel, a former chief of a division, who had just retired on a pension, "he is only sixteen; his mother dotes on him; but I shouldn't listen to his choosing a profession at his age, – a mere fancy, a notion that may pass off. In my opinion, boys should be guided and controlled."

"Ah, monsieur! you are rich, you are a man, and you have but one son," said Agathe.

"Faith!" said Claparon, "children do tyrannize over us – over our hearts, I mean. Mine makes me furious; he has nearly ruined me, and now I won't have anything to do with him – it's a sort of independence. Well, he is the happier for it, and so am I. That fellow was partly the cause of his mother's death. He chose to be a commercial traveller; and the trade just suited him, for he was no sooner in the house than he wanted to be out of it; he couldn't keep in one place, and he wouldn't learn anything. All I ask of God is that I may die before he dishonors my name. Those who have no children lose many pleasures, but they escape great sufferings."

"And these men are fathers!" thought Agathe, weeping anew.

"What I am trying to show you, my dear Madame Bridau, is that you had better let your boy be a painter; if not, you will only waste your time."

"If you were able to coerce him," said the sour Desroches, "I should advise you to oppose his tastes; but weak as I see you are, you had better let him daub if he likes."

“Console yourself, Agathe,” said Madame Descoings, “Joseph will turn out a great man.”

After this discussion, which was like all discussions, the widow’s friends united in giving her one and the same advice; which advice did not in the least relieve her anxieties. They advised her to let Joseph follow his bent.

“If he doesn’t turn out a genius,” said Du Bruel, who always tried to please Agathe, “you can then get him into some government office.”

When Madame Descoings accompanied the old clerks to the door she assured them, at the head of the stairs, that they were “Grecian sages.”

“Madame Bridau ought to be glad her son is willing to do anything,” said Claparon.

“Besides,” said Desroches, “if God preserves the Emperor, Joseph will always be looked after. Why should she worry?”

“She is timid about everything that concerns her children,” answered Madame Descoings. “Well, my good girl,” she said, returning to Agathe, “you see they are unanimous; why are you still crying?”

“If it was Philippe, I should have no anxiety. But you don’t know what goes on in that atelier; they have naked women!”

“I hope they keep good fires,” said Madame Descoings.

A few days after this, the disasters of the retreat from Moscow became known. Napoleon returned to Paris to organize fresh troops, and to ask further sacrifices from the country. The poor

mother was then plunged into very different anxieties. Philippe, who was tired of school, wanted to serve under the Emperor; he saw a review at the Tuileries, – the last Napoleon ever held, – and he became infatuated with the idea of a soldier's life. In those days military splendor, the show of uniforms, the authority of epaulets, offered irresistible seductions to a certain style of youth. Philippe thought he had the same vocation for the army that his brother Joseph showed for art. Without his mother's knowledge, he wrote a petition to the Emperor, which read as follows: —

Sire, – I am the son of your Bridau; eighteen years of age, five feet six inches; I have good legs, a good constitution, and wish to be one of your soldiers. I ask you to let me enter the army, etc.

Within twenty-four hours, the Emperor had sent Philippe to the Imperial Lyceum at Saint-Cyr, and six months later, in November, 1813, he appointed him sub-lieutenant in a regiment of cavalry. Philippe spent the greater part of that winter in cantonments, but as soon as he knew how to ride a horse he was dispatched to the front, and went eagerly. During the campaign in France he was made a lieutenant, after an affair at the outposts where his bravery had saved his colonel's life. The Emperor named him captain at the battle of La Fere-Champenoise, and took him on his staff. Inspired by such promotion, Philippe won the cross at Montereau. He witnessed Napoleon's farewell at Fontainebleau, raved at the sight, and refused to serve the Bourbons. When he returned to his mother, in July, 1814, he

found her ruined.

Joseph's scholarship was withdrawn after the holidays, and Madame Bridau, whose pension came from the Emperor's privy purse, vainly entreated that it might be inscribed on the rolls of the ministry of the interior. Joseph, more of a painter than ever, was delighted with the turn of events, and entreated his mother to let him go to Monsieur Regnault, promising to earn his own living. He declared he was quite sufficiently advanced in the second class to get on without rhetoric. Philippe, a captain at nineteen and decorated, who had, moreover, served the Emperor as an aide-de-camp in two battles, flattered the mother's vanity immensely. Coarse, blustering, and without real merit beyond the vulgar bravery of a cavalry officer, he was to her mind a man of genius; whereas Joseph, puny and sickly, with unkempt hair and absent mind, seeking peace, loving quiet, and dreaming of an artist's glory, would only bring her, she thought, worries and anxieties.

The winter of 1814-1815 was a lucky one for Joseph. Secretly encouraged by Madame Descoings and Bixiou, a pupil of Gros, he went to work in the celebrated atelier of that painter, whence a vast variety of talent issued in its day, and there he formed the closest intimacy with Schinner. The return from Elba came; Captain Bridau joined the Emperor at Lyons, accompanied him to the Tuileries, and was appointed to the command of a squadron in the dragoons of the Guard. After the battle of Waterloo – in which he was slightly wounded, and where he won

the cross of an officer of the Legion of honor – he happened to be near Marshal Davoust at Saint-Denis, and was not with the army of the Loire. In consequence of this, and through Davoust's intercession, his cross and his rank were secured to him, but he was placed on half-pay.

Joseph, anxious about his future, studied all through this period with an ardor which several times made him ill in the midst of these tumultuous events.

"It is the smell of the paints," Agathe said to Madame Descoings. "He ought to give up a business so injurious to his health."

However, all Agathe's anxieties were at this time for her son the lieutenant-colonel. When she saw him again in 1816, reduced from the salary of nine thousand francs (paid to a commander in the dragoons of the Imperial Guard) to a half-pay of three hundred francs a month, she fitted up her attic rooms for him, and spent her savings in doing so. Philippe was one of the faithful Bonapartes of the cafe Lemblin, that constitutional Boeotia; he acquired the habits, manners, style, and life of a half-pay officer; indeed, like any other young man of twenty-one, he exaggerated them, vowed in good earnest a mortal enmity to the Bourbons, never reported himself at the War department, and even refused opportunities which were offered to him for employment in the infantry with his rank of lieutenant-colonel. In his mother's eyes, Philippe seemed in all this to be displaying a noble character.

"The father himself could have done no more," she said.

Philippe's half-pay sufficed him; he cost nothing at home, whereas all Joseph's expenses were paid by the two widows. From that moment, Agathe's preference for Philippe was openly shown. Up to that time it had been secret; but the persecution of this faithful servant of the Emperor, the recollection of the wound received by her cherished son, his courage in adversity, which, voluntary though it were, seemed to her a glorious adversity, drew forth all Agathe's tenderness. The one sentence, "He is unfortunate," explained and justified everything. Joseph himself, – with the innate simplicity which superabounds in the artist-soul in its opening years, and who was, moreover, brought up to admire his big brother, – so far from being hurt by the preference of their mother, encouraged it by sharing her worship of the hero who had carried Napoleon's orders on two battlefields, and was wounded at Waterloo. How could he doubt the superiority of the grand brother, whom he had beheld in the green and gold uniform of the dragoons of the Guard, commanding his squadron on the Champ de Mars?

Agathe, notwithstanding this preference, was an excellent mother. She loved Joseph, though not blindly; she simply was unable to understand him. Joseph adored his mother; Philippe let his mother adore him. Towards her, the dragoon softened his military brutality; but he never concealed the contempt he felt for Joseph, – expressing it, however, in a friendly way. When he looked at his brother, weak and sickly as he was at seventeen years of age, shrunken with determined toil, and over-weighted

with his powerful head, he nicknamed him “Cub.” Philippe’s patronizing manners would have wounded any one less carelessly indifferent than the artist, who had, moreover, a firm belief in the goodness of heart which soldiers hid, he thought, beneath a brutal exterior. Joseph did not yet know, poor boy, that soldiers of genius are as gentle and courteous in manner as other superior men in any walk of life. All genius is alike, wherever found.

“Poor boy!” said Philippe to his mother, “we mustn’t plague him; let him do as he likes.”

To his mother’s eyes the colonel’s contempt was a mark of fraternal affection.

“Philippe will always love and protect his brother,” she thought to herself.

CHAPTER III

In 1816, Joseph obtained his mother's permission to convert the garret which adjoined his attic room into an atelier, and Madame Descoings gave him a little money for the indispensable requirements of the painter's trade; – in the minds of the two widows, the art of painting was nothing but a trade. With the feeling and ardor of his vocation, the lad himself arranged his humble atelier. Madame Descoings persuaded the owner of the house to put a skylight in the roof. The garret was turned into a vast hall painted in chocolate-color by Joseph himself. On the walls he hung a few sketches. Agathe contributed, not without reluctance, an iron stove; so that her son might be able to work at home, without, however, abandoning the studio of Gros, nor that of Schinner.

The constitutional party, supported chiefly by officers on half-pay and the Bonapartists, were at this time inciting “emeutes” around the Chamber of Deputies, on behalf of the Charter, though no one actually wanted it. Several conspiracies were brewing. Philippe, who dabbled in them, was arrested, and then released for want of proof; but the minister of war cut short his half-pay by putting him on the active list, – a step which might be called a form of discipline. France was no longer safe; Philippe was liable to fall into some trap laid for him by spies, – provocative agents, as they were called, being much talked of in

those days.

While Philippe played billiards in disaffected cafes, losing his time and acquiring the habit of wetting his whistle with “little glasses” of all sorts of liquors. Agathe lived in mortal terror for the safety of the great man of the family. The Grecian sages were too much accustomed to wend their nightly way up Madame Bridau’s staircase, finding the two widows ready and waiting, and hearing from them all the news of their day, ever to break up the habit of coming to the green salon for their game of cards. The ministry of the interior, though purged of its former *employes* in 1816, had retained Claparon, one of those cautious men, who whisper the news of the “Moniteur,” adding invariably, “Don’t quote me.” Desroches, who had retired from active service some time after old Du Bruel, was still battling for his pension. The three friends, who were witnesses of Agathe’s distress, advised her to send the colonel to travel in foreign countries.

“They talk about conspiracies, and your son, with his disposition, will be certain to fall a victim in some of them; there is plenty of treachery in these days.”

“Philippe is cut from the wood the Emperor made into marshals,” said Du Bruel, in a low voice, looking cautiously about him; “and he mustn’t give up his profession. Let him serve in the East, in India – ”

“Think of his health,” said Agathe.

“Why doesn’t he get some place, or business?” said old Desroches; “there are plenty of private offices to be had. I am

going as head of a bureau in an insurance company, as soon as I have got my pension."

"Philippe is a soldier; he would not like to be any thing else," said the warlike Agathe.

"Then he ought to have the sense to ask for employment – "

"And serve *these others!*" cried the widow. "Oh! I will never give him that advice."

"You are wrong," said Du Bruel. "My son has just got an appointment through the Duc de Navarreins. The Bourbons are very good to those who are sincere in rallying to them. Your son could be appointed lieutenant-colonel to a regiment."

"They only appoint nobles in the cavalry. Philippe would never rise to be a colonel," said Madame Descoings.

Agathe, much alarmed, entreated Philippe to travel abroad, and put himself at the service of some foreign power who, she thought, would gladly welcome a staff officer of the Emperor.

"Serve a foreign nation!" cried Philippe, with horror.

Agathe kissed her son with enthusiasm.

"His father all over!" she exclaimed.

"He is right," said Joseph. "France is too proud of her heroes to let them be heroic elsewhere. Napoleon may return once more."

However, to satisfy his mother, Philippe took up the dazzling idea of joining General Lallemand in the United States, and helping him to found what was called the Champ d'Asile, one of the most disastrous swindles that ever appeared under the name

of national subscription. Agathe gave ten thousand francs to start her son, and she went to Havre to see him off. By the end of 1817, she had accustomed herself to live on the six hundred francs a year which remained to her from her property in the Funds; then, by a lucky chance, she made a good investment of the ten thousand francs she still kept of her savings, from which she obtained an interest of seven per cent. Joseph wished to emulate his mother's devotion. He dressed like a bailiff; wore the commonest shoes and blue stockings; denied himself gloves, and burned charcoal; he lived on bread and milk and Brie cheese. The poor lad got no sympathy, except from Madame Descoings, and from Bixiou, his student-friend and comrade, who was then making those admirable caricatures of his, and filling a small office in the ministry.

"With what joy I welcomed the summer of 1818!" said Joseph Bridau in after-years, relating his troubles; "the sun saved me the cost of charcoal."

As good a colorist by this time as Gros himself, Joseph now went to his master for consultation only. He was already meditating a tilt against classical traditions, and Grecian conventionalities, in short, against the leading-strings which held down an art to which Nature *as she is* belongs, in the omnipotence of her creations and her imagery. Joseph made ready for a struggle which, from the day when he first exhibited in the Salon, has never ceased. It was a terrible year. Roguin, the notary of Madame Descoings and Madame Bridau, absconded with the

moneys held back for seven years from Madame Descoings's annuity, which by that time were producing two thousand francs a year. Three days after this disaster, a bill of exchange for a thousand francs, drawn by Philippe upon his mother, arrived from New York. The poor fellow, misled like so many others, had lost his all in the Champ d'Asile. A letter, which accompanied the bill, drove Agathe, Joseph, and the Descoings to tears, and told of debts contracted in New York, where his comrades in misfortunes had indorsed for him.

"It was I who made him go!" cried the poor mother, eager to divert the blame from Philippe.

"I advise you not to send him on many such journeys," said the old Descoings to her niece.

Madame Descoings was heroic. She continued to give the three thousand francs a year to Madame Bridau, but she still paid the dues on her treasury which had never turned up since the year 1799. About this time, she began to doubt the honesty of the government, and declared it was capable of keeping the three numbers in the urn, so as to excite the shareholders to put in enormous stakes. After a rapid survey of all their resources, it seemed to the two women impossible to raise the thousand francs without selling out the little that remained in the Funds. They talked of pawning their silver and part of the linen, and even the needless pieces of furniture. Joseph, alarmed at these suggestions, went to see Gerard and told him their circumstances. The great painter obtained an order from the household of

the king for two copies of a portrait of Louis XVIII., at five hundred francs each. Though not naturally generous, Gros took his pupil to an artist-furnishing house and fitted him out with the necessary materials. But the thousand francs could not be had till the copies were delivered, so Joseph painted four panels in ten days, sold them to the dealers and brought his mother the thousand francs with which to meet the bill of exchange when it fell due. Eight days later, came a letter from the colonel, informing his mother that he was about to return to France on board a packet from New York, whose captain had trusted him for the passage-money. Philippe announced that he should need at least a thousand francs on his arrival at Havre.

“Good,” said Joseph to his mother, “I shall have finished my copies by that time, and you can carry him the money.”

“Dear Joseph!” cried Agathe in tears, kissing her son, “God will bless you. You do love him, then, poor persecuted fellow? He is indeed our glory and our hope for the future. So young, so brave, so unfortunate! everything is against him; we three must always stand by him.”

“You see now that painting is good for something,” cried Joseph, overjoyed to have won his mother’s permission to be a great artist.

Madame Bridau rushed to meet her beloved son, Colonel Philippe, at Havre. Once there, she walked every day beyond the round tower built by Francois I., to look out for the American packet, enduring the keenest anxieties. Mothers alone know how

such sufferings quicken maternal love. The vessel arrived on a fine morning in October, 1819, without delay, and having met with no mishap. The sight of a mother and the air of one's native land produces a certain affect on the coarsest nature, especially after the miseries of a sea-voyage. Philippe gave way to a rush of feeling, which made Agathe think to herself, "Ah! how he loves me!" Alas, the hero loved but one person in the world, and that person was Colonel Philippe. His misfortunes in Texas, his stay in New York, – a place where speculation and individualism are carried to the highest pitch, where the brutality of self-interest attains to cynicism, where man, essentially isolated, is compelled to push his way for himself and by himself, where politeness does not exist, – in fact, even the minor events of Philippe's journey had developed in him the worst traits of an old campaigner: he had grown brutal, selfish, rude; he drank and smoked to excess; physical hardships and poverty had depraved him. Moreover, he considered himself persecuted; and the effect of that idea is to make persons who are unintelligent persecutors and bigots themselves. To Philippe's conception of life, the universe began at his head and ended at his feet, and the sun shone for him alone. The things he had seen in New York, interpreted by his practical nature, carried away his last scruples on the score of morality. For such beings, there are but two ways of existence. Either they believe, or they do not believe; they have the virtues of honest men, or they give themselves up to the demands of necessity; in which case they proceed to turn their slightest interests and each

passing impulse of their passions into necessities.

Such a system of life carries a man a long way. It was only in appearance that Colonel Philippe retained the frankness, plain-dealing, and easy-going freedom of a soldier. This made him, in reality, very dangerous; he seemed as guileless as a child, but, thinking only of himself, he never did anything without reflecting what he had better do, — like a wily lawyer planning some trick “a la Maitre Gonin”; words cost him nothing, and he said as many as he could to get people to believe. If, unfortunately, some one refused to accept the explanations with which he justified the contradictions between his conduct and his professions, the colonel, who was a good shot and could defy the most adroit fencing-master, and possessed the coolness of one to whom life is indifferent, was quite ready to demand satisfaction for the first sharp word; and when a man shows himself prepared for violence there is little more to be said. His imposing stature had taken on a certain rotundity, his face was bronzed from exposure in Texas, he was still succinct in speech, and had acquired the decisive tone of a man obliged to make himself feared among the populations of a new world. Thus developed, plainly dressed, his body trained to endurance by his recent hardships, Philippe in the eyes of his mother was a hero; in point of fact, he had simply become what people (not to mince matters) call a blackguard.

Shocked at the destitution of her cherished son, Madame Bridau bought him a complete outfit of clothes at Havre. After listening to the tale of his woes, she had not the heart to stop

his drinking and eating and amusing himself as a man just returned from the Champ d'Asile was likely to eat and drink and divert himself. It was certainly a fine conception, – that of conquering Texas with the remains of the imperial army. The failure was less in the idea than in the men who conceived it; for Texas is to-day a republic, with a future full of promise. This scheme of Liberalism under the Restoration distinctly proves that the interests of the party were purely selfish and not national, seeking power and nothing else. Neither men, nor occasion, nor cause, nor devotion were lacking; only the money and the support of the hypocritical party at home who dispensed enormous sums, but gave nothing when it came to recovering empire. Household managers like Agathe have a plain common-sense which enables them to perceive such political chicane: the poor woman saw the truth through the lines of her son's tale; for she had read, in the exile's interests, all the pompous editorials of the constitutional journals, and watched the management of the famous subscription, which produced barely one hundred and fifty thousand francs when it ought to have yielded five or six millions. The Liberal leaders soon found out that they were playing into the hands of Louis XVIII. by exporting the glorious remnants of our grand army, and they promptly abandoned to their fate the most devoted, the most ardent, the most enthusiastic of its heroes, – those, in short, who had gone in the advance. Agathe was never able, however, to make her son see that he was more duped than persecuted. With blind belief in her idol, she

supposed herself ignorant, and deplored, as Philippe did, the evil times which had done him such wrong. Up to this time he was, to her mind, throughout his misfortunes, less faulty than victimized by his noble nature, his energy, the fall of the Emperor, the duplicity of the Liberals, and the rancor of the Bourbons against the Bonapartists. During the week at Havre, a week which was horribly costly, she dared not ask him to make terms with the royal government and apply to the minister of war. She had hard work to get him away from Havre, where living is very expensive, and to bring him back to Paris before her money gave out. Madame Descoings and Joseph, who were awaiting their arrival in the courtyard of the coach-office of the Messageries Royales, were struck with the change in Agathe's face.

"Your mother has aged ten years in two months," whispered the Descoings to Joseph, as they all embraced, and the two trunks were being handed down.

"How do you do, mere Descoings?" was the cool greeting the colonel bestowed on the old woman whom Joseph was in the habit of calling "maman Descoings."

"I have no money to pay for a hackney-coach," said Agathe, in a sad voice.

"I have," replied the young painter. "What a splendid color Philippe has turned!" he cried, looking at his brother.

"Yes, I've browned like a pipe," said Philippe. "But as for you, you're not a bit changed, little man."

Joseph, who was now twenty-one, and much thought of by the

friends who had stood by him in his days of trial, felt his own strength and was aware of his talent; he represented the art of painting in a circle of young men whose lives were devoted to science, letters, politics, and philosophy. Consequently, he was wounded by his brother's contempt, which Philippe still further emphasized with a gesture, pulling his ears as if he were still a child. Agathe noticed the coolness which succeeded the first glow of tenderness on the part of Joseph and Madame Descoings; but she hastened to tell them of Philippe's sufferings in exile, and so lessened it. Madame Descoings, wishing to make a festival of the return of the prodigal, as she called him under her breath, had prepared one of her good dinners, to which old Claparon and the elder Desroches were invited. All the family friends were to come, and did come, in the evening. Joseph had invited Leon Giraud, d'Arthez, Michel Chrestien, Fulgence Ridal, and Horace Bianchon, his friends of the fraternity. Madame Descoings had promised Bixiou, her so-called step-son, that the young people should play at ecarte. Desroches the younger, who had now taken, under his father's stern rule, his degree at law, was also of the party. Du Bruel, Claparon, Desroches, and the Abbe Loraux carefully observed the returned exile, whose manners and coarse features, and voice roughened by the abuse of liquors, together with his vulgar glance and phraseology, alarmed them not a little. While Joseph was placing the card-tables, the more intimate of the family friends surrounded Agathe and asked, —

“What do you intend to make of Philippe?”

"I don't know," she answered, "but he is determined not to serve the Bourbons."

"Then it will be very difficult for you to find him a place in France. If he won't re-enter the army, he can't be readily got into government employ," said old Du Bruel. "And you have only to listen to him to see he could never, like my son, make his fortune by writing plays."

The motion of Agathe's eyes, with which alone she replied to this speech, showed how anxious Philippe's future made her; they all kept silence. The exile himself, Bixiou, and the younger Desroches were playing at *ecarte*, a game which was then the rage.

"Maman Descoings, my brother has no money to play with," whispered Joseph in the good woman's ear.

The devotee of the Royal Lottery fetched twenty francs and gave them to the artist, who slipped them secretly into his brother's hand. All the company were now assembled. There were two tables of *boston*; and the party grew lively. Philippe proved a bad player: after winning for awhile, he began to lose; and by eleven o'clock he owed fifty francs to young Desroches and to Bixiou. The racket and the disputes at the *ecarte* table resounded more than once in the ears of the more peaceful *boston* players, who were watching Philippe surreptitiously. The exile showed such signs of bad temper that in his final dispute with the younger Desroches, who was none too amiable himself, the elder Desroches joined in, and though his son was decidedly

in the right, he declared he was in the wrong, and forbade him to play any more. Madame Descoings did the same with her grandson, who was beginning to let fly certain witticisms; and although Philippe, so far, had not understood him, there was always a chance that one of the barbed arrows might piece the colonel's thick skull and put the sharp jester in peril.

"You must be tired," whispered Agathe in Philippe's ear; "come to bed."

"Travel educates youth," said Bixiou, grinning, when Madame Bridau and the colonel had disappeared.

Joseph, who got up at dawn and went to bed early, did not see the end of the party. The next morning Agathe and Madame Descoings, while preparing breakfast, could not help remarking that soires would be terribly expensive if Philippe were to go on playing that sort of game, as the Descoings phrased it. The worthy old woman, then seventy-six years of age, proposed to sell her furniture, give up her *appartement* on the second floor (which the owner was only too glad to occupy), and take Agathe's parlor for her chamber, making the other room a sitting-room and dining-room for the family. In this way they could save seven hundred francs a year; which would enable them to give Philippe fifty francs a month until he could find something to do. Agathe accepted the sacrifice. When the colonel came down and his mother had asked how he liked his little bedroom, the two widows explained to him the situation of the family. Madame Descoings and Agathe possessed, by putting all their resources

together, an income of five thousand three hundred francs, four thousand of which belonged to Madame Descoings and were merely a life annuity. The Descoings made an allowance of six hundred a year to Bixiou, whom she had acknowledged as her grandson during the last few months, also six hundred to Joseph, the rest of her income, together with that of Agathe, was spent for the household wants. All their savings were by this time eaten up.

“Make yourselves easy,” said the lieutenant-colonel. “I’ll find a situation and put you to no expense; all I need for the present is board and lodging.”

Agathe kissed her son, and Madame Descoings slipped a hundred francs into his hand to pay for his losses of the night before. In ten days the furniture was sold, the *appartement* given up, and the change in Agathe’s domestic arrangements accomplished with a celerity seldom seen outside of Paris. During those ten days, Philippe regularly decamped after breakfast, came back for dinner, was off again for the evening, and only got home about midnight to go to bed. He contracted certain habits half mechanically, and they soon became rooted in him; he got his boots blacked on the Pont Neuf for the two sous it would have cost him to go by the Pont des Arts to the Palais-Royal, where he consumed regularly two glasses of brandy while reading the newspapers, – an occupation which employed him till midday; after that he sauntered along the rue Vivienne to the cafe Minerve, where the Liberals congregated, and where he played at billiards with a number of old comrades. While winning and

losing, Philippe swallowed four or five more glasses of divers liquors, and smoked ten or a dozen cigars in going and coming, and idling along the streets. In the evening, after consuming a few pipes at the Hollandais smoking-rooms, he would go to some gambling-place towards ten o'clock at night. The waiter handed him a card and a pin; he always inquired of certain well-seasoned players about the chances of the red or the black, and staked ten francs when the lucky moment seemed to come; never playing more than three times, win or lose. If he won, which usually happened, he drank a tumbler of punch and went home to his garret; but by that time he talked of smashing the ultras and the Bourbon body-guard, and trolled out, as he mounted the staircase, "We watch to save the Empire!" His poor mother, hearing him, used to think "How gay Philippe is to-night!" and then she would creep up and kiss him, without complaining of the fetid odors of the punch, and the brandy, and the pipes.

"You ought to be satisfied with me, my dear mother," he said, towards the end of January; "I lead the most regular of lives."

The colonel had dined five times at a restaurant with some of his army comrades. These old soldiers were quite frank with each other on the state of their own affairs, all the while talking of certain hopes which they based on the building of a submarine vessel, expected to bring about the deliverance of the Emperor. Among these former comrades, Philippe particularly liked an old captain of the dragoons of the Guard, named Giroudeau, in whose company he had seen his first service. This friendship

with the late dragoon led Philippe into completing what Rabelais called "the devil's equipage"; and he added to his drams, and his tobacco, and his play, a "fourth wheel."

One evening at the beginning of February, Giroudeau took Philippe after dinner to the Gaite, occupying a free box sent to a theatrical journal belonging to his nephew Finot, in whose office Giroudeau was cashier and secretary. Both were dressed after the fashion of the Bonapartist officers who now belonged to the Constitutional Opposition; they wore ample overcoats with square collars, buttoned to the chin and coming down to their heels, and decorated with the rosette of the Legion of honor; and they carried malacca canes with loaded knobs, which they held by strings of braided leather. The late troopers had just (to use one of their own expressions) "made a bout of it," and were mutually unbosoming their hearts as they entered the box. Through the fumes of a certain number of bottles and various glasses of various liquors, Giroudeau pointed out to Philippe a plump and agile little ballet-girl whom he called Florentine, whose good graces and affection, together with the box, belonged to him as the representative of an all-powerful journal.

"But," said Philippe, "I should like to know how far her good graces go for such an iron-gray old trooper as you."

"Thank God," replied Giroudeau, "I've stuck to the traditions of our glorious uniform. I have never wasted a farthing upon a woman in my life."

"What's that?" said Philippe, putting a finger on his left eye.

"That is so," answered Giroudeau. "But, between ourselves, the newspaper counts for a good deal. To-morrow, in a couple of lines, we shall advise the managers to let Mademoiselle Florentine dance a particular step, and so forth. Faith, my dear boy, I'm uncommonly lucky!"

"Well!" thought Philippe; "if this worthy Giroudeau, with a skull as polished as my knee, forty-eight years, a big stomach, a face like a ploughman, and a nose like a potato, can get a ballet-girl, I ought to be the lover of the first actress in Paris. Where does one find such luck?" he said aloud.

"I'll show you Florentine's place to-night. My Dulcinea only earns fifty francs a month at the theatre," added Giroudeau, "but she is very prettily set up, thanks to an old silk dealer named Cardot, who gives her five hundred francs a month."

"Well, but – ?" exclaimed the jealous Philippe.

"Bah!" said Giroudeau; "true love is blind."

When the play was over Giroudeau took Philippe to Mademoiselle Florentine's *appartement*, which was close to the theatre, in the rue de Crussol.

"We must behave ourselves," said Giroudeau. "Florentine's mother is here. You see, I haven't the means to pay for one, so the worthy woman is really her own mother. She used to be a concierge, but she's not without intelligence. Call her Madame; she makes a point of it."

Florentine happened that night to have a friend with her, – a certain Marie Godeschal, beautiful as an angel, cold as a

danseuse, and a pupil of Vestris, who foretold for her a great choregraphic destiny. Mademoiselle Godeschal, anxious to make her first appearance at the Panorama-Dramatique under the name of Mariette, based her hopes on the protection and influence of a first gentleman of the bedchamber, to whom Vestris had promised to introduce her. Vestris, still green himself at this period, did not think his pupil sufficiently trained to risk the introduction. The ambitious girl did, in the end, make her pseudonym of Mariette famous; and the motive of her ambition, it must be said, was praiseworthy. She had a brother, a clerk in Derville's law office. Left orphans and very poor, and devoted to each other, the brother and sister had seen life such as it is in Paris. The one wished to be a lawyer that he might support his sister, and he lived on ten sous a day; the other had coldly resolved to be a dancer, and to profit by her beauty as much as by her legs that she might buy a practice for her brother. Outside of their feeling for each other, and of their mutual life and interests, everything was to them, as it once was to the Romans and the Hebrews, barbaric, outlandish, and hostile. This generous affection, which nothing ever lessened, explained Mariette to those who knew her intimately.

The brother and sister were living at this time on the eighth floor of a house in the Vieille rue du Temple. Mariette had begun her studies when she was ten years old; she was now just sixteen. Alas! for want of becoming clothes, her beauty, hidden under a coarse shawl, dressed in calico, and ill-kept, could only

be guessed by those Parisians who devote themselves to hunting grisettes and the quest of beauty in misfortune, as she trotted past them with mincing step, mounted on iron pattens. Philippe fell in love with Mariette. To Mariette, Philippe was commander of the dragoons of the Guard, a staff-officer of the Emperor, a young man of twenty-seven, and above all, the means of proving herself superior to Florentine by the evident superiority of Philippe over Giroudeau. Florentine and Giroudeau, the one to promote his comrade's happiness, the other to get a protector for her friend, pushed Philippe and Mariette into a "mariage en detrempe," – a Parisian term which is equivalent to "morganatic marriage," as applied to royal personages. Philippe when they left the house revealed his poverty to Giroudeau, but the old roue reassured him.

"I'll speak to my nephew Finot," he said. "You see, Philippe, the reign of phrases and quill-drivers is upon us; we may as well submit. To-day, scribblers are paramount. Ink has ousted gunpowder, and talk takes the place of shot. After all, these little toads of editors are pretty good fellows, and very clever. Come and see me to-morrow at the newspaper office; by that time I shall have said a word for you to my nephew. Before long you'll have a place on some journal or other. Mariette, who is taking you at this moment (don't deceive yourself) because she literally has nothing, no engagement, no chance of appearing on the stage, and I have told her that you are going on a newspaper like myself, – Mariette will try to make you believe she is loving

you for yourself; and you will believe her! Do as I do, – keep her as long as you can. I was so much in love with Florentine that I begged Finot to write her up and help her to a debut; but my nephew replied, ‘You say she has talent; well, the day after her first appearance she will turn her back on you.’ Oh, that’s Finot all over! You’ll find him a knowing one.”

The next day, about four o’clock, Philippe went to the rue de Sentier, where he found Giroudeau in the entresol, – caged like a wild beast in a sort of hen-coop with a sliding panel; in which was a little stove, a little table, two little chairs, and some little logs of wood. This establishment bore the magic words, SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE, painted on the door in black letters, and the word “Cashier,” written by hand and fastened to the grating of the cage. Along the wall that lay opposite to the cage, was a bench, where, at this moment, a one-armed man was breakfasting, who was called Coloquinte by Giroudeau, doubtless from the Egyptian colors of his skin.

“A pretty hole!” exclaimed Philippe, looking round the room. “In the name of thunder! what are you doing here, you who charged with poor Colonel Chabert at Eylau? You – a gallant officer!”

“Well, yes! broum! broum! – a gallant officer keeping the accounts of a little newspaper,” said Giroudeau, settling his black silk skull-cap. “Moreover, I’m the working editor of all that rubbish,” he added, pointing to the newspaper itself.

“And I, who went to Egypt, I’m obliged to stamp it,” said the

one-armed man.

“Hold your tongue, Coloquinte,” said Giroudeau. “You are in presence of a hero who carried the Emperor’s orders at the battle of Montereau.”

Coloquinte saluted. “That’s were I lost my missing arm!” he said.

“Coloquinte, look after the den. I’m going up to see my nephew.”

The two soldiers mounted to the fourth floor, where, in an attic room at the end of a passage, they found a young man with a cold light eye, lying on a dirty sofa. The representative of the press did not stir, though he offered cigars to his uncle and his uncle’s friend.

“My good fellow,” said Giroudeau in a soothing and humble tone, “this is the gallant cavalry officer of the Imperial Guard of whom I spoke to you.”

“Eh! well?” said Finot, eyeing Philippe, who, like Giroudeau, lost all his assurance before the diplomatist of the press.

“My dear boy,” said Giroudeau, trying to pose as an uncle, “the colonel has just returned from Texas.”

“Ah! you were taken in by that affair of the Champ d’Asile, were you? Seems to me you were rather young to turn into a Soldier-laborer.”

The bitterness of this jest will only be understood by those who remember the deluge of engravings, screens, clocks, bronzes, and plaster-casts produced by the idea of the Soldier-

laborer, a splendid image of Napoleon and his heroes, which afterwards made its appearance on the stage in vaudevilles. That idea, however, obtained a national subscription; and we still find, in the depths of the provinces, old wall-papers which bear the effigy of the Soldier-laborer. If this young man had not been Giroudeau's nephew, Philippe would have boxed his ears.

"Yes, I was taken in by it; I lost my time, and twelve thousand francs to boot," answered Philippe, trying to force a grin.

"You are still fond of the Emperor?" asked Finot.

"He is my god," answered Philippe Bridau.

"You are a Liberal?"

"I shall always belong to the Constitutional Opposition. Oh Foy! oh Manuel! oh Laffitte! what men they are! They'll rid us of these others, – these wretches, who came back to France at the heels of the enemy."

"Well," said Finot coldly, "you ought to make something out of your misfortunes; for you are the victim of the Liberals, my good fellow. Stay a Liberal, if you really value your opinions, but threaten the party with the follies in Texas which you are ready to show up. You never got a farthing of the national subscription, did you? Well, then you hold a fine position: demand an account of that subscription. I'll tell you how you can do it. A new Opposition journal is just starting, under the auspices of the deputies of the Left; you shall be the cashier, with a salary of three thousand francs. A permanent place. All you want is some one to go security for you in twenty thousand francs; find that,

and you shall be installed within a week. I'll advise the Liberals to silence you by giving you the place. Meantime, talk, threaten, – threaten loudly.”

Giroudeau let Philippe, who was profuse in his thanks, go down a few steps before him, and then he turned back to say to his nephew, “Well, you are a queer fellow! you keep me here on twelve hundred francs – ”

“That journal won't live a year,” said Finot. “I've got something better for you.”

“Thunder!” cried Philippe to Giroudeau. “He's no fool, that nephew of yours. I never once thought of making something, as he calls it, out of my position.”

That night at the cafe Lemblin and the cafe Minerve Colonel Philippe fulminated against the Liberal party, which had raised subscriptions, sent heroes to Texas, talked hypocritically of Soldier-laborers, and left them to starve, after taking the money they had put into it, and keeping them in exile for two years.

“I am going to demand an account of the moneys collected by the subscription for the Champ d'Asile,” he said to one of the frequenters of the cafe, who repeated it to the journalists of the Left.

Philippe did not go back to the rue Mazarin; he went to Mariette and told her of his forthcoming appointment on a newspaper with ten thousand subscribers, in which her choreographic claims should be warmly advanced.

Agathe and Madame Descoings waited up for Philippe in fear

and trembling, for the Duc de Berry had just been assassinated. The colonel came home a few minutes after breakfast; and when his mother showed her uneasiness at his absence, he grew angry and asked if he were not of age.

“In the name of thunder, what’s all this! here have I brought you some good news, and you both look like tombstones. The Duc de Berry is dead, is he? – well, so much the better! that’s one the less, at any rate. As for me, I am to be cashier of a newspaper, with a salary of three thousand francs, and there you are, out of all your anxieties on my account.”

“Is it possible?” cried Agathe.

“Yes; provided you can go security for me in twenty thousand francs; you need only deposit your shares in the Funds, you will draw the interest all the same.”

The two widows, who for nearly two months had been desperately anxious to find out what Philippe was about, and how he could be provided for, were so overjoyed at this prospect that they gave no thought to their other catastrophes. That evening, the Grecian sages, old Du Bruel, Claparon, whose health was failing, and the inflexible Desroches were unanimous; they all advised Madame Bridau to go security for her son. The new journal, which fortunately was started before the assassination of the Duc de Berry, just escaped the blow which Monsieur Decazes then launched at the press. Madame Bridau’s shares in the Funds, representing thirteen hundred francs’ interest, were transferred as security for Philippe, who was then appointed cashier. That good

son at once promised to pay one hundred francs every month to the two widows, for his board and lodging, and was declared by both to be the best of sons. Those who had thought ill of him now congratulated Agathe.

“We were unjust to him,” they said.

Poor Joseph, not to be behind his brother in generosity, resolved to pay for his own support, and succeeded.

CHAPTER IV

Three months later, the colonel, who ate and drank enough for four men, finding fault with the food and compelling the poor widows, on the score of his payments, to spend much money on their table, had not yet paid down a single penny. His mother and Madame Descoings were unwilling, out of delicacy, to remind him of his promise. The year went by without one of those coins which Leon Gozlan so vigorously called "tigers with five claws" finding its way from Philippe's pocket to the household purse. It is true that the colonel quieted his conscience on this score by seldom dining at home.

"Well, he is happy," said his mother; "he is easy in mind; he has a place."

Through the influence of a feuilleton, edited by Vernou, a friend of Bixiou, Finot, and Giroudeau, Mariette made her appearance, not at the Panorama-Dramatique but at the Porte-Saint-Martin, where she triumphed beside the famous Begrand. Among the directors of the theatre was a rich and luxurious general officer, in love with an actress, for whose sake he had made himself an impresario. In Paris, we frequently meet with men so fascinated with actresses, singers, or ballet-dancers, that they are willing to become directors of a theatre out of love. This officer knew Philippe and Giroudeau. Mariette's first appearance, heralded already by Finot's journal and also by

Philippe's, was promptly arranged by the three officers; for there seems to be solidarity among the passions in a matter of folly.

The mischievous Bixiou was not long in revealing to his grandmother and the devoted Agathe that Philippe, the cashier, the hero of heroes, was in love with Mariette, the celebrated ballet-dancer at the Porte-Saint-Martin. The news was a thunder-clap to the two widows; Agathe's religious principles taught her to think that all women on the stage were brands in the burning; moreover, she thought, and so did Madame Descoings, that women of that kind dined off gold, drank pearls, and wasted fortunes.

"Now do you suppose," said Joseph to his mother, "that my brother is such a fool as to spend his money on Mariette? Such women only ruin rich men."

"They talk of engaging Mariette at the Opera," said Bixiou. "Don't be worried, Madame Bridau; the diplomatic body often comes to the Porte-Saint-Martin, and that handsome girl won't stay long with your son. I did hear that an ambassador was madly in love with her. By the bye, another piece of news! Old Claparon is dead, and his son, who has become a banker, has ordered the cheapest kind of funeral for him. That fellow has no education; they wouldn't behave like that in China."

Philippe, prompted by mercenary motives, proposed to Mariette that she should marry him; but she, knowing herself on the eve of an engagement at the Grand Opera, refused the offer, either because she guessed the colonel's motive, or because

she saw how important her independence would be to her future fortune. For the remainder of this year, Philippe never came more than twice a month to see his mother. Where was he? Either at his office, or the theatre, or with Mariette. No light whatever as to his conduct reached the household of the rue Mazarin. Giroudeau, Finot, Bixiou, Vernou, Lousteau, saw him leading a life of pleasure. Philippe shared the gay amusements of Tullia, a leading singer at the Opera, of Florentine, who took Mariette's place at the Porte-Saint-Martin, of Florine and Matifat, Coralie and Camusot. After four o'clock, when he left his office, until midnight, he amused himself; some party of pleasure had usually been arranged the night before, – a good dinner, a card-party, a supper by some one or other of the set. Philippe was in his element.

This carnival, which lasted eighteen months, was not altogether without its troubles. The beautiful Mariette no sooner appeared at the Opera, in January, 1821, than she captured one of the most distinguished dukes of the court of Louis XVIII. Philippe tried to make head against the peer, and by the month of April he was compelled by his passion, notwithstanding some luck at cards, to dip into the funds of which he was cashier. By May he had taken eleven hundred francs. In that fatal month Mariette started for London, to see what could be done with the lords while the temporary opera house in the Hotel Choiseul, rue Lepelletier, was being prepared. The luckless Philippe had ended, as often happens, in loving Mariette notwithstanding her

flagrant infidelities; she herself had never thought him anything but a dull-minded, brutal soldier, the first rung of a ladder on which she had never intended to remain long. So, foreseeing the time when Philippe would have spent all his money, she captured other journalistic support which released her from the necessity of depending on him; nevertheless, she did feel the peculiar gratitude that class of women acknowledge towards the first man who smooths their way, as it were, among the difficulties and horrors of a theatrical career.

Forced to let his terrible mistress go to London without him, Philippe went into winter quarters, as he called it, – that is, he returned to his attic room in his mother's *appartement*. He made some gloomy reflections as he went to bed that night, and when he got up again. He was conscious within himself of the inability to live otherwise than as he had been living the last year. The luxury that surrounded Mariette, the dinners, the suppers, the evenings in the side-scenes, the animation of wits and journalists, the sort of racket that went on around him, the delights that tickled both his senses and his vanity, – such a life, found only in Paris, and offering daily the charm of some new thing, was now more than habit, – it had become to Philippe as much a necessity as his tobacco or his brandy. He saw plainly that he could not live without these continual enjoyments. The idea of suicide came into his head; not on account of the deficit which must soon be discovered in his accounts, but because he could no longer live with Mariette in the atmosphere of pleasure in which he had

disported himself for over a year. Full of these gloomy thoughts, he entered for the first time his brother's painting-room, where he found the painter in a blue blouse, copying a picture for a dealer.

"So that's how pictures are made," said Philippe, by way of opening the conversation.

"No," said Joseph, "that is how they are copied."

"How much do they pay you for that?"

"Eh! never enough; two hundred and fifty francs. But I study the manner of the masters and learn a great deal; I found out the secrets of their method. There's one of my own pictures," he added, pointing with the end of his brush to a sketch with the colors still moist.

"How much do you pocket in a year?"

"Unfortunately, I am known only to painters. Schinner backs me; and he has got me some work at the Chateau de Presles, where I am going in October to do some arabesques, panels, and other decorations, for which the Comte de Serizy, no doubt, will pay well. With such trifles and with orders from the dealers, I may manage to earn eighteen hundred to two thousand francs a year over and above the working expenses. I shall send that picture to the next exhibition; if it hits the public taste, my fortune is made. My friends think well of it."

"I don't know anything about such things," said Philippe, in a subdued voice which caused Joseph to turn and look at him.

"What is the matter?" said the artist, seeing that his brother

was very pale.

“I should like to know how long it would take you to paint my portrait?”

“If I worked steadily, and the weather were clear, I could finish it in three or four days.”

“That’s too long; I have only one day to give you. My poor mother loves me so much that I wished to leave her my likeness. We will say no more about it.”

“Why! are you going away again?”

“I am going never to return,” replied Philippe with an air of forced gayety.

“Look here, Philippe, what is the matter? If it is anything serious, I am a man and not a ninny. I am accustomed to hard struggles, and if discretion is needed, I have it.”

“Are you sure?”

“On my honor.”

“You will tell no one, no matter who?”

“No one.”

“Well, I am going to blow my brains out.”

“You! – are you going to fight a duel?”

“I am going to kill myself.”

“Why?”

“I have taken eleven hundred francs from the funds in my hands; I have got to send in my accounts to-morrow morning. Half my security is lost; our poor mother will be reduced to six hundred francs a year. That would be nothing! I could make a

fortune for her later; but I am dishonored! I cannot live under dishonor – ”

“You will not be dishonored if it is paid back. To be sure, you will lose your place, and you will only have the five hundred francs a year from your cross; but you can live on five hundred francs.”

“Farewell!” said Philippe, running rapidly downstairs, and not waiting to hear another word.

Joseph left his studio and went down to breakfast with his mother; but Philippe’s confession had taken away his appetite. He took Madame Descoings aside and told her the terrible news. The old woman made a frightened exclamation, let fall the saucepan of milk she had in her hand, and flung herself into a chair. Agathe rushed in; from one exclamation to another the mother gathered the fatal truth.

“He! to fail in honor! the son of Bridau to take the money that was trusted to him!”

The widow trembled in every limb; her eyes dilated and then grew fixed; she sat down and burst into tears.

“Where is he?” she cried amid the sobs. “Perhaps he has flung himself into the Seine.”

“You must not give up all hope,” said Madame Descoings, “because a poor lad has met with a bad woman who has led him to do wrong. Dear me! we see that every day. Philippe has had such misfortunes! he has had so little chance to be happy and loved that we ought not to be surprised at his passion for that

creature. All passions lead to excess. My own life is not without reproach of that kind, and yet I call myself an honest woman. A single fault is not vice; and after all, it is only those who do nothing that are never deceived.”

Agathe’s despair overcame her so much that Joseph and the Descoings were obliged to lessen Philippe’s wrong-doings by assuring her that such things happened in all families.

“But he is twenty-eight years old,” cried Agathe, “he is no longer a child.”

Terrible revelation of the inward thought of the poor woman on the conduct of her son.

“Mother, I assure you he thought only of your sufferings and of the wrong he had done you,” said Joseph.

“Oh, my God! let him come back to me, let him live, and I will forgive all,” cried the poor mother, to whose mind a horrible vision of Philippe dragged dead out of the river presented itself.

Gloomy silence reigned for a short time. The day went by with cruel alternations of hope and fear; all three ran to the window at the least sound, and gave way to every sort of conjecture. While the family were thus grieving, Philippe was quietly getting matters in order at his office. He had the audacity to give in his accounts with a statement that, fearing some accident, he had retained eleven hundred francs at his own house for safe keeping. The scoundrel left the office at five o’clock, taking five hundred francs more from the desk, and coolly went to a gambling-house, which he had not entered since his connection

with the paper, for he knew very well that a cashier must not be seen to frequent such a place. The fellow was not wanting in acumen. His past conduct proved that he derived more from his grandfather Rouget than from his virtuous sire, Bridau. Perhaps he might have made a good general; but in private life, he was one of those utter scoundrels who shelter their schemes and their evil actions behind a screen of strict legality, and the privacy of the family roof.

At this conjuncture Philippe maintained his coolness. He won at first, and gained as much as six thousand francs; but he let himself be dazzled by the idea of getting out of his difficulties at one stroke. He left the trente-et-quarante, hearing that the black had come up sixteen times at the roulette table, and was about to put five thousand francs on the red, when the black came up for the seventeenth time. The colonel then put a thousand francs on the black and won. In spite of this remarkable piece of luck, his head grew weary; he felt it, though he continued to play. But that divining sense which leads a gambler, and which comes in flashes, was already failing him. Intermittent perceptions, so fatal to all gamblers, set in. Lucidity of mind, like the rays of the sun, can have no effect except by the continuity of a direct line; it can divine only on condition of not breaking that line; the curvettings of chance bemuddle it. Philippe lost all. After such a strain, the careless mind as well as the bravest weakens. When Philippe went home that night he was not thinking of suicide, for he had never really meant to kill himself; he no longer thought of his

lost place, nor of the sacrificed security, nor of his mother, nor of Mariette, the cause of his ruin; he walked along mechanically. When he got home, his mother in tears, Madame Descoings, and Joseph, all fell on his neck and kissed him and brought him joyfully to a seat by the fire.

“Bless me!” thought he, “the threat has worked.”

The brute at once assumed an air suitable to the occasion; all the more easily, because his ill-luck at cards had deeply depressed him. Seeing her atrocious Benjamin so pale and woe-begone, the poor mother knelt beside him, kissed his hands, pressed them to her heart, and gazed at him for a long time with eyes swimming in tears.

“Philippe,” she said, in a choking voice, “promise not to kill yourself, and all shall be forgotten.”

Philippe looked at his sorrowing brother and at Madame Descoings, whose eyes were full of tears, and thought to himself, “They are good creatures.” Then he took his mother in his arms, raised her and put her on his knee, pressed her to his heart and whispered as he kissed her, “For the second time, you give me life.”

The Descoings managed to serve an excellent dinner, and to add two bottles of old wine with a little “liqueur des îles,” a treasure left over from her former business.

“Agathe,” she said at dessert, “we must let him smoke his cigars,” and she offered some to Philippe.

These two poor creatures fancied that if they let the fellow take

his ease, he would like his home and stay in it; both, therefore, tried to endure his tobacco-smoke, though each loathed it. That sacrifice was not so much as noticed by Philippe.

On the morrow, Agathe looked ten years older. Her terrors calmed, reflection came back to her, and the poor woman had not closed an eye throughout that horrible night. She was now reduced to six hundred francs a year. Madame Descoings, like all fat women fond of good eating, was growing heavy; her step on the staircase sounded like the chopping of logs; she might die at any moment; with her life, four thousand francs would disappear. What folly to rely on that resource! What should she do? What would become of them? With her mind made up to become a sick-nurse rather than be supported by her children, Agathe did not think of herself. But Philippe? what would he do if reduced to live on the five hundred francs of an officer of the Legion of honor? During the past eleven years, Madame Descoings, by giving up three thousand francs a year, had paid her debt twice over, but she still continued to sacrifice her grandson's interests to those of the Bridau family. Though all Agathe's honorable and upright feelings were shocked by this terrible disaster, she said to herself: "Poor boy! is it his fault? He is faithful to his oath. I have done wrong not to marry him. If I had found him a wife, he would not have got entangled with this danseuse. He has such a vigorous constitution – "

Madame Descoings had likewise reflected during the night as to the best way of saving the honor of the family. At daybreak,

she got out of bed and went to her friend's room.

"Neither you nor Philippe should manage this delicate matter," she urged. "Our two old friends Du Bruel and Claparon are dead, but we still have Desroches, who is very sagacious. I'll go and see him this morning. He can tell the newspaper people that Philippe trusted a friend and has been made a victim; that his weakness in such respects makes him unfit to be a cashier; what has now happened may happen again, and that Philippe prefers to resign. That will prevent his being turned off."

Agathe, seeing that this business lie would save the honor of her son, at any rate in the eyes of strangers, kissed Madame Descoings, who went out early to make an end of the dreadful affair.

Philippe, meanwhile, had slept the sleep of the just. "She is sly, that old woman," he remarked, when his mother explained to him why breakfast was late.

Old Desroches, the last remaining friend of these two poor women, who, in spite of his harsh nature, never forgot that Bridau had obtained for him his place, fulfilled like an accomplished diplomat the delicate mission Madame Descoings had confided to him. He came to dine that evening with the family, and notified Agathe that she must go the next day to the Treasury, rue Vivienne, sign the transfer of the funds involved, and obtain a coupon for the six hundred francs a year which still remained to her. The old clerk did not leave the afflicted household that night without obliging Philippe to sign a petition to the

minister of war, asking for his reinstatement in the active army. Desroches promised the two women to follow up the petition at the war office, and to profit by the triumph of a certain duke over Philippe in the matter of the danseuse, and so obtain that nobleman's influence.

"Philippe will be lieutenant-colonel in the Duc de Maufrigneuse's regiment within three months," he declared, "and you will be rid of him."

Desroches went away, smothered with blessings from the two poor widows and Joseph. As to the newspaper, it ceased to exist at the end of two months, just as Finot had predicted. Philippe's crime had, therefore, so far as the world knew, no consequences. But Agathe's motherhood had received a deadly wound. Her belief in her son once shaken, she lived in perpetual fear, mingled with some satisfactions, as she saw her worst apprehensions unrealized.

When men like Philippe, who are endowed with physical courage, and yet are cowardly and ignoble in their moral being, see matters and things resuming their accustomed course about them after some catastrophe in which their honor and decency is well-nigh lost, such family kindness, or any show of friendliness towards them is a premium of encouragement. They count on impunity; their minds distorted, their passions gratified, only prompt them to study how it happened that they succeeded in getting round all social laws; the result is they become alarmingly adroit.

A fortnight later, Philippe, once more a man of leisure, lazy and bored, renewed his fatal cafe life, – his drams, his long games of billiards embellished with punch, his nightly resort to the gambling-table, where he risked some trifling stake and won enough to pay for his dissipations. Apparently very economical, the better to deceive his mother and Madame Descoings, he wore a hat that was greasy, with the nap rubbed off at the edges, patched boots, a shabby overcoat, on which the red ribbon scarcely showed so discolored and dirty was it by long service at the buttonhole and by the splatterings of coffee and liquors. His buckskin gloves, of a greenish tinge, lasted him a long while; and he only gave up his satin neckcloth when it was ragged enough to look like wadding. Mariette was the sole object of the fellow's love, and her treachery had greatly hardened his heart. When he happened to win more than usual, or if he supped with his old comrade, Giroudeau, he followed some Venus of the slums, with brutal contempt for the whole sex. Otherwise regular in his habits, he breakfasted and dined at home and came in every night about one o'clock. Three months of this horrible life restored Agathe to some degree of confidence.

As for Joseph, who was working at the splendid picture to which he afterwards owed his reputation, he lived in his atelier. On the prediction of her grandson Bixiou, Madame Descoings believed in Joseph's future glory, and she showed him every sort of motherly kindness; she took his breakfast to him, she did his errands, she blacked his boots. The painter was never seen till

dinner-time, and his evenings were spent at the Cenacle among his friends. He read a great deal, and gave himself that deep and serious education which only comes through the mind itself, and which all men of talent strive after between the ages of twenty and thirty. Agathe, seeing very little of Joseph, and feeling no uneasiness about him, lived only for Philippe, who gave her the alternations of fears excited and terrors allayed, which seem the life, as it were, of sentiment, and to be as necessary to maternity as to love. Desroches, who came once a week to see the widow of his patron and friend, gave her hopes. The Duc de Maufrigneuse had asked to have Philippe in his regiment; the minister of war had ordered an inquiry; and as the name of Bridau did not appear on any police list, nor on any record at the Palais de Justice, Philippe would be reinstated in the army early in the coming year.

To arrive at this result, Desroches set all the powers that he could influence in motion. At the prefecture of police he learned that Philippe spent his evenings in the gambling-house; and he thought it best to tell this fact privately to Madame Descoings, exhorting her keep an eye on the lieutenant-colonel, for one outbreak would imperil all; as it was, the minister of war was not likely to inquire whether Philippe gambled. Once restored to his rank under the flag of his country, he would perhaps abandon a vice only taken up from idleness. Agathe, who no longer received her friends in the evening, sat in the chimney-corner reading her prayers, while Madame Descoings consulted

the cards, interpreted her dreams, and applied the rules of the “cabala” to her lottery ventures. This jovial fanatic never missed a single drawing; she still pursued her trey, – which never turned up. It was nearly twenty-one years old, just approaching its majority; on this ridiculous idea the old woman now pinned her faith. One of its three numbers had stayed at the bottom of all the wheels ever since the institution of the lottery. Accordingly, Madame Descoings laid heavy stakes on that particular number, as well as on all the combinations of the three numbers. The last mattress remaining to her bed was the place where she stored her savings; she unsewed the ticking, put in from time to time the bit of gold saved from her needs, wrapped carefully in wool, and then sewed the mattress up again. She intended, at the last drawing, to risk all her savings on the different combinations of her treasured trey.

This passion, so universally condemned, has never been fairly studied. No one has understood this opium of poverty. The lottery, all-powerful fairy of the poor, bestowed the gift of magic hopes. The turn of the wheel which opens to the gambler a vista of gold and happiness, lasts no longer than a flash of lightning, but the lottery gave five days’ existence to that magnificent flash. What social power can to-day, for the sum of five sous, give us five days’ happiness and launch us ideally into all the joys of civilization? Tobacco, a craving far more immoral than play, destroys the body, attacks the mind, and stupefies a nation; while the lottery did nothing of the kind. This passion, moreover, was

forced to keep within limits by the long periods that occurred between the drawings, and by the choice of wheels which each investor individually clung to. Madame Descoings never staked on any but the “wheel of Paris.” Full of confidence that the trey cherished for twenty-one years was about to triumph, she now imposed upon herself enormous privations, that she might stake a large amount of savings upon the last drawing of the year. When she dreamed her cabalistic visions (for all dreams did not correspond with the numbers of the lottery), she went and told them to Joseph, who was the sole being who would listen, and not only not scold her, but give her the kindly words with which an artist knows how to soothe the follies of the mind. All great talents respect and understand a real passion; they explain it to themselves by finding the roots of it in their own hearts or minds. Joseph’s ideas was, that his brother loved tobacco and liquors, Maman Descoings loved her trey, his mother loved God, Desroches the younger loved lawsuits, Desroches the elder loved angling, – in short, all the world, he said, loved something. He himself loved the “beau ideal” in all things; he loved the poetry of Lord Byron, the painting of Gericault, the music of Rossini, the novels of Walter Scott. “Every one to his taste, maman,” he would say; “but your trey does hang fire terribly.”

“It will turn up, and you will be rich, and my little Bixiou as well.”

“Give it all to your grandson,” cried Joseph; “at any rate, do what you like best with it.”

“Hey! when it turns up I shall have enough for everybody. In the first place, you shall have a fine atelier; you sha’n’t deprive yourself of going to the opera so as to pay for your models and your colors. Do you know, my dear boy, you make me play a pretty shabby part in that picture of yours?”

By way of economy, Joseph had made the Descoings pose for his magnificent painting of a young courtesan taken by an old woman to a Doge of Venice. This picture, one of the masterpieces of modern painting, was mistaken by Gros himself for a Titian, and it paved the way for the recognition which the younger artists gave to Joseph’s talent in the Salon of 1823.

“Those who know you know very well what you are,” he answered gayly. “Why need you trouble yourself about those who don’t know you?”

For the last ten years Madame Descoings had taken on the ripe tints of a russet apple at Easter. Wrinkles had formed in her superabundant flesh, now grown pallid and flabby. Her eyes, full of life, were bright with thoughts that were still young and vivacious, and might be considered grasping; for there is always something of that spirit in a gambler. Her fat face bore traces of dissimulation and of the mental reservations hidden in the depths of her heart. Her vice necessitated secrecy. There were also indications of gluttony in the motion of her lips. And thus, although she was, as we have seen, an excellent and upright woman, the eye might be misled by her appearance. She was an admirable model for the old woman Joseph wished to paint.

Coralie, a young actress of exquisite beauty who died in the flower of her youth, the mistress of Lucien de Rubempre, one of Joseph's friends, had given him the idea of the picture. This noble painting has been called a plagiarism of other pictures, while in fact it was a splendid arrangement of three portraits. Michel Chrestien, one of his companions at the Cenacle, lent his republican head for the senator, to which Joseph added a few mature tints, just as he exaggerated the expression of Madame Descoings's features. This fine picture, which was destined to make a great noise and bring the artist much hatred, jealousy, and admiration, was just sketched out; but, compelled as he was to work for a living, he laid it aside to make copies of the old masters for the dealers; thus he penetrated the secrets of their processes, and his brush is therefore one of the best trained of the modern school. The shrewd sense of an artist led him to conceal the profits he was beginning to lay by from his mother and Madame Descoings, aware that each had her road to ruin, – the one in Philippe, the other in the lottery. This astuteness is seldom wanting among painters; busy for days together in the solitude of their studios, engaged in work which, up to a certain point, leaves the mind free, they are in some respects like women, – their thoughts turn about the little events of life, and they contrive to get at their hidden meaning.

Joseph had bought one of those magnificent chests or coffers of a past age, then ignored by fashion, with which he decorated a corner of his studio, where the light danced upon the bas-reliefs

and gave full lustre to a masterpiece of the sixteenth century artisans. He saw the necessity for a hiding-place, and in this coffer he had begun to accumulate a little store of money. With an artist's carelessness, he was in the habit of putting the sum he allowed for his monthly expenses in a skull, which stood on one of the compartments of the coffer. Since his brother had returned to live at home, he found a constant discrepancy between the amount he spent and the sum in this receptacle. The hundred francs a month disappeared with incredible celerity. Finding nothing one day, when he had only spent forty or fifty francs, he remarked for the first time: "My money must have got wings." The next month he paid more attention to his accounts; but add as he might, like Robert Macaire, sixteen and five are twenty-three, he could make nothing of them. When, for the third time, he found a still more important discrepancy, he communicated the painful fact to Madame Descoings, who loved him, he knew, with that maternal, tender, confiding, credulous, enthusiastic love that he had never had from his own mother, good as she was, – a love as necessary to the early life of an artist as the care of the hen is to her unfledged chickens. To her alone could he confide his horrible suspicions. He was as sure of his friends as he was of himself; and the Descoings, he knew, would take nothing to put in her lottery. At the idea which then suggested itself the poor woman wrung her hands. Philippe alone could have committed this domestic theft.

"Why didn't he ask me, if he wanted it?" cried Joseph, taking

a dab of color on his palette and stirring it into the other colors without seeing what he did. "Is it likely I should refuse him?"

"It is robbing a child!" cried the Descoings, her face expressing the deepest disgust.

"No," replied Joseph, "he is my brother; my purse is his: but he ought to have asked me."

"Put in a special sum, in silver, this morning, and don't take anything out," said Madame Descoings. "I shall know who goes into the studio; and if he is the only one, you will be certain it is he."

The next day Joseph had proof of his brother's forced loans upon him. Philippe came to the studio when his brother was out and took the little sum he wanted. The artist trembled for his savings.

"I'll catch him at it, the scamp!" he said, laughing, to Madame Descoings.

"And you'll do right: we ought to break him of it. I, too, I have missed little sums out of my purse. Poor boy! he wants tobacco; he's accustomed to it."

"Poor boy! poor boy!" cried the artist. "I'm rather of Fulgence and Bixiou's opinion: Philippe is a dead-weight on us. He runs his head into riots and has to be shipped to America, and that costs the mother twelve thousand francs; he can't find anything to do in the forests of the New World, and so he comes back again, and that costs twelve thousand more. Under pretence of having carried two words of Napoleon to a general, he thinks himself a

great soldier and makes faces at the Bourbons; meantime, what does he do? amuse himself, travel about, see foreign countries! As for me, I'm not duped by his misfortunes; he doesn't look like a man who fails to get the best of things! Somebody finds him a good place, and there he is, leading the life of a Sardanapalus with a ballet-girl, and guzzling the funds of his journal; that costs the mother another twelve thousand francs! I don't care two straws for myself, but Philippe will bring that poor woman to beggary. He thinks I'm of no account because I was never in the dragoons of the Guard; but perhaps I shall be the one to support that poor dear mother in her old age, while he, if he goes on as he does, will end I don't know how. Bixiou often says to me, 'He is a downright rogue, that brother of yours.' Your grandson is right. Philippe will be up to some mischief that will compromise the honor of the family, and then we shall have to scrape up another ten or twelve thousand francs! He gambles every night; when he comes home, drunk as a templar, he drops on the staircase the pricked cards on which he marks the turns of the red and black. Old Desroches is trying to get him back into the army, and, on my word on honor, I believe he would hate to serve again. Would you ever have believed that a boy with such heavenly blue eyes and the look of Bayard could turn out such a scoundrel?"

CHAPTER V

In spite of the coolness and discretion with which Philippe played his trifling game every night, it happened every now and then that he was what gamblers call "cleaned out." Driven by the irresistible necessity of having his evening stake of ten francs, he plundered the household, and laid hands on his brother's money and on all that Madame Descoings or Agathe left about. Already the poor mother had had a dreadful vision in her first sleep: Philippe entered the room and took from the pockets of her gown all the money he could find. Agathe pretended to sleep, but she passed the rest of the night in tears. She saw the truth only too clearly. "One wrong act is not a vice," Madame Descoings had declared; but after so many repetitions, vice was unmistakable. Agathe could doubt no longer; her best-beloved son had neither delicacy nor honor.

On the morrow of that frightful vision, before Philippe left the house after breakfast, she drew him into her chamber and begged him, in a tone of entreaty, to ask her for what money he needed. After that, the applications were so numerous that in two weeks Agathe was drained of all her savings. She was literally without a penny, and began to think of finding work. The means of earning money had been discussed in the evenings between herself and Madame Descoings, and she had already taken patterns of worsted work to fill in, from a shop called the

“Pere de Famille,” – an employment which pays about twenty sous a day. Notwithstanding Agathe’s silence on the subject, Madame Descoings had guessed the motive of this desire to earn money by women’s-work. The change in her appearance was eloquent: her fresh face had withered, the skin clung to the temples and the cheek-bones, and the forehead showed deep lines; her eyes lost their clearness; an inward fire was evidently consuming her; she wept the greater part of the night. A chief cause of these outward ravages was the necessity of hiding her anguish, her sufferings, her apprehensions. She never went to sleep until Philippe came in; she listened for his step, she had learned the inflections of his voice, the variations of his walk, the very language of his cane as it touched the pavement. Nothing escaped her. She knew the degree of drunkenness he had reached, she trembled as she heard him stumble on the stairs; one night she picked up some pieces of gold at the spot where he had fallen. When he had drunk and won, his voice was gruff and his cane dragged; but when he had lost, his step had something sharp, short and angry about it; he hummed in a clear voice, and carried his cane in the air as if presenting arms. At breakfast, if he had won, his behavior was gay and even affectionate; he joked roughly, but still he joked, with Madame Descoings, with Joseph, and with his mother; gloomy, on the contrary, when he had lost, his brusque, rough speech, his hard glance, and his depression, frightened them. A life of debauch and the abuse of liquors debased, day by day, a countenance that was once so

handsome. The veins of the face were swollen with blood, the features became coarse, the eyes lost their lashes and grew hard and dry. No longer careful of his person, Philippe exhaled the miasmas of a tavern and the smell of muddy boots, which, to an observer, stamped him with debauchery.

“You ought,” said Madame Descoings to Philippe during the last days of December, “you ought to get yourself new-clothed from head to foot.”

“And who is to pay for it?” he answered sharply. “My poor mother hasn’t a sou; and I have five hundred francs a year. It would take my whole year’s pension to pay for the clothes; besides I have mortgaged it for three years – ”

“What for?” asked Joseph.

“A debt of honor. Giroudeau borrowed a thousand francs from Florentine to lend me. I am not gorgeous, that’s a fact; but when one thinks that Napoleon is at Saint Helena, and has sold his plate for the means of living, his faithful soldiers can manage to walk on their bare feet,” he said, showing his boots without heels, as he marched away.

“He is not bad,” said Agathe, “he has good feelings.”

“You can love the Emperor and yet dress yourself properly,” said Joseph. “If he would take any care of himself and his clothes, he wouldn’t look so like a vagabond.”

“Joseph! you ought to have some indulgence for your brother,” cried Agathe. “You do the things you like, while he is certainly not in his right place.”

“What did he leave it for?” demanded Joseph. “What can it matter to him whether Louis the Eighteenth’s bugs or Napoleon’s cuckoos are on the flag, if it is the flag of his country? France is France! For my part, I’d paint for the devil. A soldier ought to fight, if he is a soldier, for the love of his art. If he had stayed quietly in the army, he would have been a general by this time.”

“You are unjust to him,” said Agathe, “your father, who adored the Emperor, would have approved of his conduct. However, he has consented to re-enter the army. God knows the grief it has caused your brother to do a thing he considers treachery.”

Joseph rose to return to his studio, but his mother took his hand and said: —

“Be good to your brother; he is so unfortunate.”

When the artist got back to his painting-room, followed by Madame Descoings, who begged him to humor his mother’s feelings, and pointed out to him how changed she was, and what inward suffering the change revealed, they found Philippe there, to their great amazement.

“Joseph, my boy,” he said, in an off-hand way, “I want some money. Confound it! I owe thirty francs for cigars at my tobacconist’s, and I dare not pass the cursed shop till I’ve paid it. I’ve promised to pay it a dozen times.”

“Well, I like your present way best,” said Joseph; “take what you want out of the skull.”

“I took all there was last night, after dinner.”

"There was forty-five francs."

"Yes, that's what I made it," replied Philippe. "I took them; is there any objection?"

"No, my friend, no," said Joseph. "If you were rich, I should do the same by you; only, before taking what I wanted, I should ask you if it were convenient."

"It is very humiliating to ask," remarked Philippe; "I would rather see you taking as I do, without a word; it shows more confidence. In the army, if a comrade dies, and has a good pair of boots, and you have a bad pair, you change, that's all."

"Yes, but you don't take them while he is living."

"Oh, what meanness!" said Philippe, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, so you haven't got any money?"

"No," said Joseph, who was determined not to show his hiding-place.

"In a few days we shall be rich," said Madame Descoings.

"Yes, you; you think your trey is going to turn up on the 25th at the Paris drawing. You must have put in a fine stake if you think you can make us all rich."

"A paid-up trey of two hundred francs will give three millions, without counting the couplets and the singles."

"At fifteen thousand times the stake – yes, you are right; it is just two hundred you must pay up!" cried Philippe.

Madame Descoings bit her lips; she knew she had spoken imprudently. In fact, Philippe was asking himself as he went downstairs: —

“That old witch! where does she keep her money? It is as good as lost; I can make a better use of it. With four pools at fifty francs each, I could win two hundred thousand francs, and that’s much surer than the turning up of a trey.”

He tried to think where the old woman was likely to have hid the money. On the days preceding festivals, Agathe went to church and stayed there a long time; no doubt she confessed and prepared for the communion. It was now the day before Christmas; Madame Descoings would certainly go out to buy some dainties for the “reveillon,” the midnight meal; and she might also take occasion to pay up her stake. The lottery was drawn every five days in different localities, at Bordeaux, Lyons, Lille, Strasburg, and Paris. The Paris lottery was drawn on the twenty-fifth of each month, and the lists closed on the twenty-fourth, at midnight. Philippe studied all these points and set himself to watch. He came home at midday; the Descoings had gone out, and had taken the key of the *appartement*. But that was no difficulty. Philippe pretended to have forgotten something, and asked the concierge to go herself and get a locksmith, who lived close by, and who came at once and opened the door. The villain’s first thought was the bed; he uncovered it, passed his hands over the mattress before he examined the bedstead, and at the lower end felt the pieces wrapped up in paper. He at once ripped the ticking, picked out twenty napoleons, and then, without taking time to sew up the mattress, re-made the bed neatly enough, so that Madame Descoings could suspect nothing.

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