HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE VILLAGE RECTOR

Оноре де Бальзак

The Village Rector

де Бальзак О.

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Содержание

Honoré de Balzac
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DEDICATION

To Helene.

The tiniest boat is not launched upon the sea without the protection of some living emblem or revered name, placed upon it by the mariners. In accordance with this time-honored custom, Madame, I pray you to be the protectress of this book now launched upon our literary ocean; and may the Imperial name which the Church has canonized and your devotion has doubly sanctified for me guard it from perils.

De Balzac.

I. THE SAUVIATS

In the lower town of Limoges, at the corner of the rue de la Vieille-Poste and the rue de la Cite might have been seen, a generation ago, one of those shops which were scarcely changed from the period of the middle-ages. Large tiles seamed with a thousand cracks lay on the soil itself, which was damp in places, and would have tripped up those who failed to observe the hollows and ridges of this singular flooring. The dusty walls exhibited a curious mosaic of wood and brick, stones and iron, welded together with a solidity due to time, possibly to chance. For more than a hundred years the ceiling, formed of colossal beams, bent beneath the weight of the upper stories, though it had never given way under them. Built *en colombage*, that is to say, with a wooden frontage, the whole facade was covered with slates, so put on as to form geometrical figures, – thus preserving a naive image of the burgher habitations of the olden time.

None of the windows, cased in wood and formerly adorned with carvings, now destroyed by the action of the weather, had continued plumb; some bobbed forward, others tipped backward, while a few seemed disposed to fall apart; all had a compost of earth, brought from heaven knows where, in the nooks and crannies hollowed by the rain, in which the spring-tide brought forth fragile flowers, timid creeping plants, and sparse herbage. Moss carpeted the roof and draped its supports. The corner pillar, with its composite masonry of stone blocks mingled with brick and pebbles, was alarming to the eye by reason of its curvature; it seemed on the point of giving way under the weight of the house, the gable of which overhung it by at least half a foot. The municipal authorities and the commissioner of highways did, eventually, pull the old building down, after buying it, to enlarge the square.

The pillar we have mentioned, placed at the angle of two streets, was a treasure to the seekers for Limousin antiquities, on account of its lovely sculptured niche in which was a Virgin, mutilated during the Revolution. All visitors with archaeological proclivities found traces of the stone sockets used to hold the candelabra in which public piety lighted tapers or placed its *ex-votos* and flowers.

At the farther end of the shop, a worm-eaten wooden staircase led to the two upper floors which were in turn surmounted by an attic. The house, backing against two adjoining houses, had no depth and derived all its light from the front and side windows. Each floor had two small chambers only, lighted by single windows, one looking out on the rue de la Cite, the other on the rue de la Vieille-Poste.

In the middle-ages no artisan was better lodged. The house had evidently belonged in those times to makers of halberds and battle-axes, armorers in short, artificers whose work was not injured by exposure to the open air; for it was impossible to see clearly within, unless the iron shutters were raised from each side of the building; where were also two doors, one on either side of the corner pillar, as may be seen in many shops at the corners of streets. From the sill of each door – of fine stone worn by the tread of centuries – a low wall about three feet high began; in this wall was a groove or slot, repeated above in the beam by which the wall of each facade was supported. From time immemorial the heavy shutters had been rolled along these grooves, held there by enormous iron bars, while the doors were closed and secured in the same manner; so that these merchants and artificers could bar themselves into their houses as into a fortress.

Examining the interior, which, during the first twenty years of this century, was encumbered with old iron and brass, tires of wheels, springs, bells, anything in short which the destruction of buildings afforded of old metals, persons interested in the relics of the old town noticed signs of the flue of a forge, shown by a long trail of soot, – a minor detail which confirmed the conjecture of archaeologists as to the original use to which the building was put. On the first floor (above the ground-floor) was one room and the kitchen; on the floor above that were two bedrooms. The garret was used to put away articles more choice and delicate than those that lay pell-mell about the shop.

This house, hired in the first instance, was subsequently bought by a man named Sauviat, a hawker or peddler who, from 1786 to 1793, travelled the country over a radius of a hundred and fifty miles around Auvergne, exchanging crockery of a common kind, plates, dishes, glasses, – in short, the necessary articles of the poorest households, – for old iron, brass, and lead, or any metal under any shape it might lurk in. The Auvergnat would give, for instance, a brown earthenware saucepan worth two sous for a pound of lead, two pounds of iron, a broken spade or hoe or a cracked kettle; and being invariably the judge of his own cause, he did the weighing.

At the close of his third year Sauviat added the hawking of tin and copper ware to that of his pottery. In 1793 he was able to buy a chateau sold as part of the National domain, which he at once pulled to pieces. The profits were such that he repeated the process at several points of the sphere in which he operated; later, these first successful essays gave him the idea of proposing something of a like nature on a larger scale to one of his compatriots who lived in Paris. Thus it happened that the "Bande Noire," so celebrated for its devastations, had its birth in the brain of old Sauviat, the peddler, whom all Limoges afterward saw and knew for twenty-seven years in the rickety old shop among his cracked bells and rusty bars, chains and scales, his twisted leaden gutters, and metal rubbish of all kinds. We must do him the justice to say that he knew nothing of the celebrity or the extent of the association he originated; he profited by his own idea only in proportion to the capital he entrusted to the since famous firm of Bresac.

Tired of frequenting fairs and roaming the country, the Auvergnat settled at Limoges, where he married, in 1797, the daughter of a coppersmith, a widower, named Champagnac. When his father-in-law died he bought the house in which he had been carrying on his trade of old-iron dealer, after ceasing to roam the country as a peddler. Sauviat was fifty years of age when he married old Champagnac's daughter, who was herself not less than thirty. Neither handsome nor pretty, she was nevertheless born in Auvergne, and the *patois* seemed to be the mutual attraction; also she had the sturdy frame which enables women to bear hard work. In the first three years of their married life Sauviat continued to do some peddling, and his wife accompanied him, carrying iron or lead on her back, and leading the miserable horse and cart full of crockery with which her husband plied a disguised usury. Dark-skinned, high-colored, enjoying robust health, and showing when she laughed a brilliant set of teeth, white, long, and broad as almonds, Madame Sauviat had the hips and bosom of a woman made by Nature expressly for maternity.

If this strong girl were not earlier married, the fault must be attributed to the Harpagon "no dowry" her father practised, though he never read Moliere. Sauviat was not deterred by the lack of dowry; besides, a man of fifty can't make difficulties, not to speak of the fact that such a wife would save him the cost of a servant. He added nothing to the furniture of his bedroom where, from the day of his wedding to the day he left the house, twenty years later, there was never anything but a single four-post bed, with valance and curtains of green serge, a chest, a bureau, four chairs, a table, and a looking-glass, all collected from different localities. The chest contained in its upper section pewter plates, dishes, etc., each article dissimilar from the rest. The kitchen can be imagined from the bedroom.

Neither husband nor wife knew how to read, – a slight defect of education which did not prevent them from ciphering admirably and doing a most flourishing business. Sauviat never bought any article without the certainty of being able to sell it for one hundred per cent profit. To relieve himself of the necessity of keeping books and accounts, he bought and sold for cash only. He had, moreover, such a perfect memory that the cost of any article, were it only a farthing, remained in his mind year after year, together with its accrued interest.

Except during the time required for her household duties, Madame Sauviat was always seated in a rickety wooden chair placed against the corner pillar of the building. There she knitted and looked at the passers, watched over the old iron, sold and weighed it, and received payment if Sauviat was away making purchases. When at home the husband could be heard at daybreak pushing open his

shutters; the household dog rushed out into the street; and Madame Sauviat presently came out to help her man in spreading upon the natural counter made by the low walls on either side of the corner of the house on the two streets, the multifarious collection of bells, springs, broken gunlocks, and the other rubbish of their business, which gave a poverty-stricken look to the establishment, though it usually contained as much as twenty thousand francs' worth of lead, steel, iron, and other metals.

Never were the former peddler and his wife known to speak of their fortune; they concealed its amount as carefully as a criminal hides a crime; and for years they were suspected of shaving both gold and silver coins. When Champagnac died the Sauviats made no inventory of his property; but they rummaged, with the intelligence of rats, into every nook and corner of the old man's house, left it as naked as a corpse, and sold the wares it contained in their own shop.

Once a year, in December, Sauviat went to Paris in one of the public conveyances. The gossips of the neighborhood concluded that in order to conceal from others the amount of his fortune, he invested it himself on these occasions. It was known later that, having been connected in his youth with one of the most celebrated dealers in metal, an Auvergnat like himself, who was living in Paris, Sauviat placed his funds with the firm of Bresac, the mainspring and spine of that famous association known by the name of the "Bande Noire," which, as we have already said, took its rise from a suggestion made by Sauviat himself.

Sauviat was a fat little man with a weary face, endowed by Nature with a look of honesty which attracted customers and facilitated the sale of goods. His straightforward assertions, and the perfect indifference of his tone and manner, increased this impression. In person, his naturally ruddy complexion was hardly perceptible under the black metallic dust which powdered his curly black hair and the seams of a face pitted with the small-pox. His forehead was not without dignity; in fact, it resembled the well-known brow given by all painters to Saint Peter, the man of the people, the roughest, but withal the shrewdest, of the apostles. His hands were those of an indefatigable worker, – large, thick, square, and wrinkled with deep furrows. His chest was of seemingly indestructible muscularity. He never relinquished his peddler's costume, – thick, hobnailed shoes; blue stockings knit by his wife and hidden by leather gaiters; bottle-green velveteen trousers; a checked waistcoat, from which depended the brass key of his silver watch by an iron chain which long usage had polished till it shone like steel; a jacket with short tails, also of velveteen, like that of the trousers; and around his neck a printed cotton cravat much frayed by the rubbing of his beard.

On Sundays and fete-days Sauviat wore a frock-coat of maroon cloth, so well taken care of that two new ones were all he bought in twenty years. The living of galley-slaves would be thought sumptuous in comparison with that of the Sauviats, who never ate meat except on the great festivals of the Church. Before paying out the money absolutely needed for their daily subsistence, Madame Sauviat would feel in the two pockets hidden between her gown and petticoat, and bring forth a single well-scraped coin, – a crown of six francs, or perhaps a piece of fifty-five sous, – which she would gaze at for a long time before she could bring herself to change it. As a general thing the Sauviats ate herrings, dried peas, cheese, hard eggs in salad, vegetables seasoned in the cheapest manner. Never did they lay in provisions, except perhaps a bunch of garlic or onions, which could not spoil and cost but little. The small amount of wood they burned in winter they bought of itinerant sellers day by day. By seven in winter, by nine in summer, the household was in bed, and the shop was closed and guarded by a huge dog, which got its living from the kitchens in the neighborhood. Madame Sauviat used about three francs' worth of candles in the course of the year.

The sober, toilsome life of these persons was brightened by one joy, but that was a natural joy, and for it they made their only known outlays. In May, 1802, Madame Sauviat gave birth to a daughter. She was confined all alone, and went about her household work five days later. She nursed her child in the open air, seated as usual in her chair by the corner pillar, continuing to sell old iron while the infant sucked. Her milk cost nothing, and she let her little daughter feed on it for two years, neither of them being the worse for the long nursing.

Veronique (that was the infant's name) became the handsomest child in the Lower town, and every one who saw her stopped to look at her. The neighbors then noticed for the first time a trace of feeling in the old Sauviats, of which they had supposed them devoid. While the wife cooked the dinner the husband held the little one, or rocked it to the tune of an Auvergnat song. The workmen as they passed sometimes saw him motionless gazing at Veronique asleep on her mother's knees. He softened his harsh voice when he spoke to her, and wiped his hands on his trousers before taking her up. When Veronique tried to walk, the father bent his legs and stood at a little distance holding out his arms and making little grimaces which contrasted funnily with the rigid furrows of his stern, hard face. The man of iron, brass, and lead became a being of flesh and blood and bones. If he happened to be standing with his back against the corner pillar motionless, a cry from Veronique would agitate him and send him flying over the mounds of iron fragments to find her; for she spent her childhood playing with the wreck of ancient castles heaped in the depths of that old shop. There were other days on which she went to play in the street or with the neighboring children; but even then her mother's eye was always on her.

It is not unimportant to say here that the Sauviats were eminently religious. At the very height of the Revolution they observed both Sunday and fete-days. Twice Sauviat came near having his head cut off for hearing mass from an unsworn priest. He was put in prison, being justly accused of helping a bishop, whose life he saved, to fly the country. Fortunately the old-iron dealer, who knew the ways of bolts and bars, was able to escape; nevertheless he was condemned to death by default, and as, by the bye, he never purged himself of that contempt, he may be said to have died dead.

His wife shared his piety. The avariciousness of the household yielded to the demands of religion. The old-iron dealers gave their alms punctually at the sacrament and to all the collections in church. When the vicar of Saint-Etienne called to ask help for his poor, Sauviat or his wife fetched at once without reluctance or sour faces the sum they thought their fair share of the parish duties. The mutilated Virgin on their corner pillar never failed (after 1799) to be wreathed with holly at Easter. In the summer season she was feted with bouquets kept fresh in tumblers of blue glass; this was particularly the case after the birth of Veronique. On the days of the processions the Sauviats scrupulously hung their house with sheets covered with flowers, and contributed money to the erection and adornment of the altar, which was the pride and glory of the whole square.

Veronique Sauviat was, therefore, brought up in a Christian manner. From the time she was seven years old she was taught by a Gray sister from Auvergne to whom the Sauviats had done some kindness in former times. Both husband and wife were obliging when the matter did not affect their pockets or consume their time, – like all poor folk who are cordially ready to be serviceable to others in their own way. The Gray sister taught Veronique to read and write; she also taught her the history of the people of God, the catechism, the Old and the New Testaments, and a very little arithmetic. That was all; the worthy sister thought it enough; it was in fact too much.

At nine years of age Veronique surprised the whole neighborhood with her beauty. Every one admired her face, which promised much to the pencil of artists who are always seeking a noble ideal. She was called "the Little Virgin" and showed signs already of a fine figure and great delicacy of complexion. Her Madonna-like face – for the popular voice had well named her – was surrounded by a wealth of fair hair, which brought out the purity of her features. Whoever has seen the sublime Virgin of Titian in his great picture of the "Presentation" at Venice, will know that Veronique was in her girlhood, – the same ingenuous candor, the same seraphic astonishment in her eyes, the same simple yet noble attitude, the same majesty of childhood in her demeanor.

At eleven years of age she had the small-pox, and owed her life to the care of Soeur Marthe. During the two months that their child was in danger the Sauviats betrayed to the whole community the depth of their tenderness. Sauviat no longer went about the country to sales; he stayed in the shop, going upstairs and down to his daughter's room, sitting up with her every night in company with his wife. His silent anguish seemed so great that no one dared to speak to him; his neighbors looked at

him with compassion, but they only asked news of Veronique from Soeur Marthe. During the days when the child's danger reached a crisis, the neighbors and passers saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, tears in his eyes and rolling down his hollow cheeks; he did not wipe them, but stood for hours as if stupefied, not daring to go upstairs to his daughter's room, gazing before him and seeing nothing, so oblivious of all things that any one might have robbed him.

Veronique was saved, but her beauty perished. Her face, once exquisitely colored with a tint in which brown and rose were harmoniously mingled, came out from the disease with a myriad of pits which thickened the skin, the flesh beneath it being deeply indented. Even her forehead did not escape the ravages of the scourge; it turned brown and looked as though it were hammered, like metal. Nothing can be more discordant than brick tones of the skin surrounded by golden hair; they destroy all harmony. These fissures in the tissues, capriciously hollowed, injured the purity of the profile and the delicacy of the lines of the face, especially that of the nose, the Grecian form of which was lost, and that of the chin, once as exquisitely rounded as a piece of white porcelain. The disease left nothing unharmed except the parts it was unable to reach, – the eyes and the teeth. She did not, however, lose the elegance and beauty of her shape, – neither the fulness of its lines nor the grace and suppleness of her waist. At fifteen Veronique was still a fine girl, and to the great consolation of her father and mother, a good and pious girl, busy, industrious, and domestic.

After her convalescence and after she had made her first communion, her parents gave her the two chambers on the second floor for her own particular dwelling. Sauviat, so course in his way of living for himself and his wife, now had certain perceptions of what comfort might be; a vague idea came to him of consoling his child for her great loss, which, as yet, she did not comprehend. The deprivation of that beauty which was once the pride and joy of those two beings made Veronique the more dear and precious to them. Sauviat came home one day, bearing a carpet he had chanced upon in some of his rounds, which he nailed himself on Veronique's floor. For her he saved from the sale of an old chateau the gorgeous bed of a fine lady, upholstered in red silk damask, with curtains and chairs of the same rich stuff. He furnished her two rooms with antique articles, of the true value of which he was wholly ignorant. He bought mignonette and put the pots on the ledge outside her window; and he returned from many of his trips with rose trees, or pansies, or any kind of flower which gardeners or tavern-keepers would give him.

If Veronique could have made comparisons and known the character, past habits, and ignorance of her parents she would have seen how much there was of affection in these little things; but as it was, she simply loved them from her own sweet nature and without reflection.

The girl wore the finest linen her mother could find in the shops. Madame Sauviat left her daughter at liberty to buy what materials she liked for her gowns and other garments; and the father and mother were proud of her choice, which was never extravagant. Veronique was satisfied with a blue silk gown for Sundays and fete-days, and on working-days she wore merino in winter and striped cotton dresses in summer. On Sundays she went to church with her father and mother, and took a walk after vespers along the banks of the Vienne or about the environs. On other days she stayed at home, busy in filling worsted-work patterns, the payment for which she gave to the poor, – a life of simple, chaste, and exemplary principles and habits. She did some reading together with her tapestry, but never in any books except those lent to her by the vicar of Saint-Etienne, a priest whom Soeur Marthe had first made known to her parents.

All the rules of the Sauviat's domestic economy were suspended in favor of Veronique. Her mother delighted in giving her dainty things to eat, and cooked her food separately. The father and mother still ate their nuts and dry bread, their herrings and parched peas fricasseed in salt butter, while for Veronique nothing was thought too choice and good.

"Veronique must cost you a pretty penny," said a hatmaker who lived opposite to the Sauviats and had designs on their daughter for his son, estimating the fortune of the old-iron dealer at a hundred thousand francs.

"Yes, neighbor, yes," Pere Sauviat would say; "if she asked me for ten crowns I'd let her have them. She has all she wants; but she never asks for anything; she is as gentle as a lamb."

Veronique was, as a matter of fact, absolutely ignorant of the value of things. She had never wanted for anything; she never saw a piece of gold till the day of her marriage; she had no money of her own; her mother bought and gave her everything she needed and wished for; so that even when she wanted to give alms to a beggar, the girl felt in her mother's pocket for the coin.

"If that's so," remarked the hatmaker, "she can't cost you much."

"So you think, do you?" replied Sauviat. "You wouldn't get off under forty crowns a year, I can tell you that. Why, her room, she has at least a hundred crowns' worth of furniture in it! But when a man has but one child, he doesn't mind. The little we own will all go to her."

"The little! Why, you must be rich, pere Sauviat! It is pretty nigh forty years that you have been doing a business in which there are no losses."

"Ha! I sha'n't go to the poorhouse for want of a thousand francs or so!" replied the old-iron dealer.

From the day when Veronique lost the soft beauty which made her girlish face the admiration of all who saw it, Pere Sauviat redoubled in activity. His business became so prosperous that he now went to Paris several times a year. Every one felt that he wanted to compensate his daughter by force of money for what he called her "loss of profit." When Veronique was fifteen years old a change was made in the internal manners and customs of the household. The father and mother went upstairs in the evenings to their daughter's apartment, where Veronique would read to them, by the light of a lamp placed behind a glass globe full of water, the "Vie des Saints," the "Lettres Edifiantes," and other books lent by the vicar. Madame Sauviat knitted stockings, feeling that she thus recouped herself for the cost of oil. The neighbors could see through the window the old couple seated motionless in their armchairs, like Chinese images, listening to their daughter, and admiring her with all the powers of their contracted minds, obtuse to everything that was not business or religious faith.

II. VERONIQUE

There are, no doubt, many young girls in the world as pure as Veronique, but none purer or more modest. Her confessions might have surprised the angels and rejoiced the Blessed Virgin.

At sixteen years of age she was fully developed, and appeared the woman she was eventually to become. She was of medium height, neither her father nor her mother being tall; but her figure was charming in its graceful suppleness, and in the serpentine curves laboriously sought by painters and sculptors, – curves which Nature herself draws so delicately with her lissom outlines, revealed to the eye of artists in spite of swathing linen and thick clothes, which mould themselves, inevitably, upon the nude. Sincere, simple, and natural, Veronique set these beauties of her form into relief by movements that were wholly free from affectation. She brought out her "full and complete effect," if we may borrow that strong term from legal phraseology. She had the plump arms of the Auvergnat women, the red and dimpled hand of a barmaid, and her strong but well-shaped feet were in keeping with the rest of her figure.

At times there seemed to pass within her a marvellous and delightful phenomenon which promised to Love a woman concealed thus far from every eye. This phenomenon was perhaps one cause of the admiration her father and mother felt for her beauty, which they often declared to be divine, – to the great astonishment of their neighbors. The first to remark it were the priests of the cathedral and the worshippers with her at the same altar. When a strong emotion took possession of Veronique, – and the religious exaltation to which she yielded herself on receiving the communion must be counted among the strongest emotions of so pure and candid a young creature, – an inward light seemed to efface for the moment all traces of the small-pox. The pure and radiant face of her childhood reappeared in its pristine beauty. Though slightly veiled by the thickened surface disease had laid there, it shone with the mysterious brilliancy of a flower blooming beneath the water of the sea when the sun is penetrating it. Veronique was changed for a few moments; the Little Virgin reappeared and then disappeared again, like a celestial vision. The pupils of her eyes, gifted with the power of great expansion, widened until they covered the whole surface of the blue iris except for a tiny circle. Thus the metamorphose of the eye, which became as keen and vivid as that of an eagle, completed the extraordinary change in the face. Was it the storm of restrained passions; was it some power coming from the depths of the soul, which enlarged the pupils in full daylight as they sometimes in other eyes enlarge by night, darkening the azure of those celestial orbs?

However that may be, it was impossible to look indifferently at Veronique as she returned to her seat from the altar where she had united herself with God, – a moment when she appeared to all the parish in her primitive splendor. At such moments her beauty eclipsed that of the most beautiful of women. What a charm was there for the man who loved her, guarding jealously that veil of flesh which hid the woman's soul from every eye, – a veil which the hand of love might lift for an instant and then let drop over conjugal delights! Veronique's lips were faultlessly curved and painted in the clear vermilion of her pure warm blood. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little heavy, in the acceptation given by painters to that term, – a heaviness which is, according to the relentless laws of physiognomy, the indication of an almost morbid vehemence in passion. She had above her brow, which was finely modelled and almost imperious, a magnificent diadem of hair, voluminous, redundant, and now of a chestnut color.

From the age of sixteen to the day of her marriage Veronique's bearing was always thoughtful, and sometimes melancholy. Living in such deep solitude, she was forced, like other solitary persons, to examine and consider the spectacle of that which went on within her, – the progress of her thought, the variety of the images in her mind, and the scope of feelings warmed and nurtured in a life so pure.

Those who looked up from their lower level as they passed along the rue de la Cite might have seen, on all fine days, the daughter of the Sauviats sitting at her open window, sewing, embroidering,

or pricking the needle through the canvas of her worsted-work, with a look that was often dreamy. Her head was vividly defined among the flowers which poetized the brown and crumbling sills of her casement windows with their leaded panes. Sometimes the reflection of the red damask window-curtains added to the effect of that head, already so highly colored; like a crimson flower she glowed in the aerial garden so carefully trained upon her window-sill.

The quaint old house possessed therefore something more quaint than itself, – the portrait of a young girl worthy of Mieris, or Van Ostade, or Terburg, or Gerard Douw, framed in one of those old, defaced, half ruined windows the brushes of the old Dutch painters loved so well. When some stranger, surprised or interested by the building, stopped before it and gazed at the second story, old Sauviat would poke his head beyond the overhanging projection, certain that he should see his daughter at her window. Then he would retreat into the shop rubbing his hands and saying to his wife in the Auvergne vernacular: —

"Hey! old woman; they're admiring your daughter!"

In 1820 an incident occurred in the simple uneventful life the girl was leading, which might have had no importance in the life of any other young woman, but which, in point of fact, did no doubt exercise over Veronique's future a terrible influence.

On one of the suppressed church fete-days, when many persons went about their daily labor, though the Sauviats scrupulously closed their shop, attended mass, and took a walk, Veronique passed, on their way to the fields, a bookseller's stall on which lay a copy of "Paul and Virginia." She had a fancy to buy it for the sake of the engraving, and her father paid a hundred sous for the fatal volume, which he put into the pocket of his coat.

"Wouldn't it be well to show that book to Monsieur le vicaire before you read it?" said her mother, to whom all printed books were a sealed mystery.

"I thought of it," answered Veronique.

The girl passed the whole night reading the story, – one of the most touching bits of writing in the French language. The picture of mutual love, half Biblical and worthy of the earlier ages of the world, ravaged her heart. A hand – was it divine or devilish? – raised the veil which, till then, had hidden nature from her. The Little Virgin still existing in the beautiful young girl thought on the morrow that her flowers had never been so beautiful; she heard their symbolic language, she looked into the depths of the azure sky with a fixedness that was almost ecstasy, and tears without a cause rolled down her cheeks.

In the life of all women there comes a moment when they comprehend their destiny, – when their hitherto mute organization speaks peremptorily. It is not always a man, chosen by some furtive involuntary glance, who awakens their slumbering sixth sense; oftener it is some unexpected sight, the aspect of scenery, the *coup d'oeil* of religious pomp, the harmony of nature's perfumes, a rosy dawn veiled in slight mists, the winning notes of some divinest music, or indeed any unexpected motion within the soul or within the body. To this lonely girl, buried in that old house, brought up by simple, half rustic parents, who had never heard an unfit word, whose pure unsullied mind had never known the slightest evil thought, – to the angelic pupil of Soeur Marthe and the vicar of Saint-Etienne the revelation of love, the life of womanhood, came from the hand of genius through one sweet book. To any other mind the book would have offered no danger; to her it was worse in its effects than an obscene tale. Corruption is relative. There are chaste and virgin natures which a single thought corrupts, doing all the more harm because no thought of the duty of resistance has occurred.

The next day Veronique showed the book to the good priest, who approved the purchase; for what could be more childlike and innocent and pure than the history of Paul and Virginia? But the warmth of the tropics, the beauty of the scenery, the almost puerile innocence of a love that seemed so sacred had done their work on Veronique. She was led by the sweet and noble achievement of its author to the worship of the Ideal, that fatal human religion! She dreamed of a lover like Paul. Her thoughts caressed the voluptuous image of that balmy isle. Childlike, she named an island in the

Vienne, below Limoges and nearly opposite to the Faubourg Saint-Martial, the Ile de France. Her mind lived there in the world of fancy all young girls construct, – a world they enrich with their own perfections. She spent long hours at her window, looking at the artisans or the mechanics who passed it, the only men whom the modest position of her parents allowed her to think of. Accustomed, of course, to the idea of eventually marrying a man of the people, she now became aware of instincts within herself which revolved from all coarseness.

In such a situation she naturally made many a romance such as young girls are fond of weaving. She clasped the idea – perhaps with the natural ardor of a noble and virgin imagination – of ennobling one of those men, and of raising him to the height where her own dreams led her. She may have made a Paul of some young man who caught her eye, merely to fasten her wild ideas on an actual being, as the mists of a damp atmosphere, touched by frost, crystallize on the branches of a tree by the wayside. She must have flung herself deep into the abysses of her dream, for though she often returned bearing on her brow, as if from vast heights, some luminous reflections, oftener she seemed to carry in her hand the flowers that grew beside a torrent she had followed down a precipice.

On the warm summer evenings she would ask her father to take her on his arm to the banks of the Vienne, where she went into ecstasies over the beauties of the sky and fields, the glories of the setting sun, or the infinite sweetness of the dewy evening. Her soul exhaled itself thenceforth in a fragrance of natural poesy. Her hair, until then simply wound about her head, she now curled and braided. Her dress showed some research. The vine which was running wild and naturally among the branches of the old elm, was transplanted, cut and trained over a green and pretty trellis.

After the return of old Sauviat (then seventy years of age) from a trip to Paris in December, 1822, the vicar came to see him one evening, and after a few insignificant remarks he said suddenly: —

"You had better think of marrying your daughter, Sauviat. At your age you ought not to put off the accomplishment of so important a duty."

"But is Veronique willing to be married?" asked the old man, startled.

"As you please, father," she said, lowering her eyes.

"Yes, we'll marry her!" cried stout Madame Sauviat, smiling.

"Why didn't you speak to me about it before I went to Paris, mother?" said Sauviat. "I shall have to go back there."

Jerome-Baptiste Sauviat, a man in whose eyes money seemed to constitute the whole of happiness, who knew nothing of love, and had never seen in marriage anything but the means of transmitting property to another self, had long sworn to marry Veronique to some rich bourgeois, – so long, in fact, that the idea had assumed in his brain the characteristics of a hobby. His neighbor, the hat-maker, who possessed about two thousand francs a year, had already asked, on behalf of his son, to whom he proposed to give up his hat-making establishment, the hand of a girl so well known in the neighborhood for her exemplary conduct and Christian principles. Sauviat had politely refused, without saying anything to Veronique. The day after the vicar – a very important personage in the eyes of the Sauviat household – had mentioned the necessary of marrying Veronique, whose confessor he was, the old man shaved and dressed himself as for a fete-day, and went out without saying a word to his wife or daughter; both knew very well, however, that the father was in search of a son-in-law. Old Sauviat went to Monsieur Graslin.

Monsieur Graslin, a rich banker in Limoges, had, like Sauviat himself, started from Auvergne without a penny; he came to Limoges to be a porter, found a place as an office-boy in a financial house, and there, like many other financiers, he made his way by dint of economy, and also through fortunate circumstances. Cashier at twenty-five years of age, partner ten years later, in the firm of Perret and Grossetete, he ended by finding himself the head of the house, after buying out the senior partners, both of whom retired into the country, leaving him their funds to manage in the business at a low interest.

Pierre Graslin, then forty-seven years of age, was supposed to possess about six hundred thousand francs. The estimate of his fortune had lately increased throughout the department, in consequence of his outlay in having built, in a new quarter of the town called the place d'Arbres (thus assisting to give Limoges an improved aspect), a fine house, the front of it being on a line with a public building with the facade of which it corresponded. This house had now been finished six months, but Pierre Graslin delayed furnishing it; it had cost him so much that he shrank from the further expense of living in it. His vanity had led him to transgress the wise laws by which he governed his life. He felt, with the good sense of a business man, that the interior of the house ought to correspond with the character of the outside. The furniture, silver-ware, and other needful accessories to the life he would have to lead in his new mansion would, he estimated, cost him nearly as much as the original building. In spite, therefore, of the gossip of tongues and the charitable suppositions of his neighbors, he continued to live on in the damp, old, and dirty ground-floor apartment in the rue Montantmanigne where his fortune had been made. The public carped, but Graslin had the approval of his former partners, who praised a resolution that was somewhat uncommon.

A fortune and a position like those of Pierre Graslin naturally excited the greed of not a few in a small provincial city. During the last ten years more than one proposition of marriage had been intimated to Monsieur Graslin. But the bachelor state was so well suited to a man who was busy from morning till night, overrun with work, eager in the pursuit of money as a hunter for game, and always tired out with his day's labor, that Graslin fell into none of the traps laid for him by ambitious mothers who coveted so brilliant a position for their daughters.

Graslin, another Sauviat in an upper sphere, did not spend more than forty sous a day, and clothed himself no better than his under-clerk. Two clerks and an office-boy sufficed him to carry on his business, which was immense through the multiplicity of its details. One clerk attended to the correspondence; the other had charge of the accounts; but Pierre Graslin was himself the soul, and body too, of the whole concern. His clerks, chosen from his own relations, were safe men, intelligent and as well-trained in the work as himself. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a truck horse, – up at five in the morning at all seasons, and never getting to bed before eleven at night.

Graslin employed a charwoman by the day, an old peasant from Auvergne, who did his cooking. The brown earthenware off which he ate, and the stout coarse linen which he used, were in keeping with the character of his food. The old woman had strict orders never to spend more than three francs daily for the total expenses of the household. The office-boy was also man-of-all-work. The clerks took care of their own rooms. The tables of blackened wood, the straw chairs half unseated, the wretched beds, the counters and desks, in short, the whole furniture of house and office was not worth more than a thousand francs, including a colossal iron safe, built into the wall, before which slept the man-of-all-work with two dogs at his feet.

Graslin did not often go into society, which, however, discussed him constantly. Two or three times a year he dined with the receiver-general, with whom his business brought him into occasional intercourse. He also occasionally took a meal at the prefecture; for he had been appointed, much to his regret, a member of the Council-general of the department – "a waste of time," he remarked. Sometimes his brother bankers with whom he had dealings kept him to breakfast or dinner; and he was forced also to visit his former partners, who spent their winters in Limoges. He cared so little to keep up his relations to society that in twenty-five years Graslin had not offered so much as a glass of water to any one. When he passed along the street persons would nudge each other and say: "That's Monsieur Graslin"; meaning, "There's a man who came to Limoges without a penny and has now acquired an enormous fortune." The Auvergnat banker was a model which more than one father pointed out to his son, and wives had been known to fling him in the faces of their husbands.

We can now understand the reasons that led a man who had become the pivot of the financial machine of Limoges to repulse the various propositions of marriage which parents never ceased to make to him. The daughters of his partners, Messrs. Perret and Grossetete, were married before

Graslin was in a position to take a wife; but as each of these ladies had young daughters, the wiseheads of the community finally concluded that old Perret or old Grossetete had made an arrangement with Graslin to wait for one of his granddaughters, and thenceforth they left him alone.

Sauviat had watched the ascending career of his compatriot more attentively and seriously than any one else. He had known him from the time he first came to Limoges; but their respective positions had changed so much, at least apparently, that their friendship, now become merely superficial, was seldom freshened. Still, in his relation as compatriot, Graslin never disdained to talk with Sauviat when they chanced to meet. Both continued to keep up their early *tutoiement*, but only in their native dialect. When the receiver-general of Bourges, the youngest of the brothers Grossetete, married his daughter in 1823 to the youngest son of Comte Fontaine, Sauviat felt sure that the Grossetetes would never allow Graslin to enter their family.

After his conference with the banker, Pere Sauviat returned home joyously. He dined that night in his daughter's room, and after dinner he said to his womenkind: —

"Veronique will be Madame Graslin."

"Madame Graslin!" exclaimed Mere Sauviat, astounded.

"Is it possible?" said Veronique, to whom Graslin was personally unknown, and whose imagination regarded him very much as a Parisian grisette would regard a Rothschild.

"Yes, it is settled," said old Sauviat solemnly. "Graslin will furnish his house magnificently; he is to give our daughter a fine Parisian carriage and the best horses to be found in the Limousin; he will buy an estate worth five hundred thousand francs, and settle that and his town-house upon her. Veronique will be the first lady in Limoges, the richest in the department, and she can do what she pleases with Graslin."

Veronique's education, her religious ideas, and her boundless affection for her parents, prevented her from making a single objection; it did not even cross her mind to think that she had been disposed of without reference to her own will. On the morrow Sauviat went to Paris, and was absent for nearly a week.

Pierre Graslin was, as can readily be imagined, not much of a talker; he went straight and rapidly to deeds. A thing decided on was a thing done. In February, 1822, a strange piece of news burst like a thunderbolt on the town of Limoges. The hotel Graslin was being handsomely furnished; carriers' carts came day after day from Paris, and their contents were unpacked in the courtyard. Rumors flew about the town as to the beauty and good taste of the modern or the antique furniture as it was seen to arrive. The great firm of Odiot and Company sent down a magnificent service of plate by the mail-coach. Three carriages, a caleche, a coupe, and a cabriolet arrived, wrapped in straw with as much care as if they were jewels.

"Monsieur Graslin is going to be married!"

These words were said by every pair of lips in Limoges in the course of a single evening, – in the salons of the upper classes, in the kitchens, in the shops, in the streets, in the suburbs, and before long throughout the whole surrounding country. But to whom? No one could answer. Limoges had a mystery.

III. MARRIAGE

On the return of old Sauviat Graslin paid his first evening visit at half-past nine o'clock. Veronique was expecting him, dressed in her blue silk gown and muslin guimpe, over which fell a collaret made of lawn with a deep hem. Her hair was simply worn in two smooth bandeaus, gathered into a Grecian knot at the back of her head. She was seated on a tapestried chair beside her mother, who occupied a fine armchair with a carved back, covered with red velvet (evidently the relic of some old chateau), which stood beside the fireplace. A bright fire blazed on the hearth. On the chimney-piece, at either side of an antique clock, the value of which was wholly unknown to the Sauviats, six wax candles in two brass sconces twisted like vine-shoots, lighted the dark room and Veronique in all her budding prime. The old mother was wearing her best gown.

From the silent street, at that tranquil hour, through the soft shadows of the ancient stairway, Graslin appeared to the modest, artless Veronique, her mind still dwelling on the sweet ideas which Bernadin de Saint-Pierre had given her of love.

Graslin, who was short and thin, had thick black hair like the bristles of a brush, which brought into vigorous relief a face as red as that of a drunkard emeritus, and covered with suppurating pimples, either bleeding or about to burst. Without being caused by eczema or scrofula, these signs of a blood overheated by continual toil, anxiety, and the lust of business, by wakeful nights, poor food, and a sober life, seemed to partake of both these diseases. In spite of the advice of his partners, his clerks, and his physician, the banker would never compel himself to take the healthful precautions which might have prevented, or would at least modify, this malady, which was slight at first, but had greatly increased from year to year. He wanted to cure it, and would sometimes take baths or drink some prescribed potion; but, hurried along on the current of his business, he soon neglected the care of his person. Sometimes he thought of suspending work for a time, travelling about, and visiting the noted baths for such diseases; but where is the hunter after millions who is willing to stop short?

In that blazing furnace shone two gray eyes rayed with green lines starting from the pupils, and speckled with brown spots, – two implacable eyes, full of resolution, rectitude, and shrewd calculation. Graslin's nose was short and turned up; he had a mouth with thick lips, a prominent forehead, and high cheek-bones, coarse ears with large edges discolored by the condition of his blood, – in short, he was an ancient satyr in a black satin waistcoat, brown frock-coat, and white cravat. His strong and vigorous shoulders, which began life by bearing heavy burdens, were now rather bent; and beneath this torso, unduly developed, came a pair of weak legs, rather badly affixed to the short thighs. His thin and hairy hands had the crooked fingers of those whose business it is to handle money. The habit of quick decision could be seen in the way the eyebrows rose into a point over each arch of the eye. Though the mouth was grave and pinched, its expression was that of inward kindliness; it told of an excellent nature, sunk in business, smothered possibly, though it might revive by contact with a woman.

At this apparition Veronique's heart was violently agitated; blackness came before her eyes; she thought she cried aloud; but she really sat there mute, with fixed and staring gaze.

"Veronique, this is Monsieur Graslin," said old Sauviat.

Veronique rose, curtsied, dropped back into her chair, and looked at her mother, who was smiling at the millionaire, seeming, as her father did, so happy, – so happy that the poor girl found strength to hide her surprise and her violent repulsion. During the conversation which then took place something was said of Graslin's health. The banker looked naively into the mirror, with bevelled edges in an ebony frame.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am not good-looking."

Thereupon he proceeded to explain the blotches on his face as the result of his overworked life. He related how he had constantly disobeyed his physician's advice; and remarked that he hoped to

change his appearance altogether when he had a wife to rule his household, and take better care of him than he took of himself.

"Is a man married for his face, compatriot?" said Sauviat, giving the other a hearty slap on the thigh.

Graslin's speech went straight to those natural feelings which, more or less, fill the heart of every woman. The thought came into Veronique's mind that her face, too, had been destroyed by a horrible disease, and her Christian modesty rebuked her first impression.

Hearing a whistle in the street, Graslin went downstairs, followed by Sauviat. They speedily returned. The office-boy had brought the first bouquet, which was a little late in coming. When the banker exhibited this mound of exotic flowers, the fragrance of which completely filled the room, and offered it to his future wife, Veronique felt a rush of conflicting emotions; she was suddenly plunged into the ideal and fantastic world of tropical nature. Never before had she seen white camelias, never had she smelt the fragrance of the Alpine cistus, the Cape jessamine, the cedronella, the volcameria, the moss-rose, or any of the divine perfumes which woo to love, and sing to the heart their hymns of fragrance. Graslin left Veronique that night in the grasp of such emotions.

From this time forth, as soon as all Limoges was sleeping, the banker would slip along the walls to the Sauviats' house. There he would tap gently on the window-shutter; the dog did not bark; old Sauviat came down and let him in, and Graslin would then spend an hour or two with Veronique in the brown room, where Madame Sauviat always served him a true Auvergnat supper. Never did this singular lover arrive without a bouquet made of the rarest flowers from the greenhouse of his old partner, Monsieur Grossetete, the only person who as yet knew of the approaching marriage. The man-of-all-work went every evening to fetch the bunch, which Monsieur Grossetete made himself.

Graslin made about fifty such visits in two months; each time, besides the flowers, he brought with him some rich present, – rings, a watch, a gold chain, a work-box, etc. These inconceivable extravagances must be explained, and a word suffices. Veronique's dowry, promised by her father, consisted of nearly the whole of old Sauviat's property, namely, seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man retained an income of eight thousand francs derived from the Funds, bought for him originally for sixty thousand francs in assignats by his correspondent Brezac, to whom, at the time of his imprisonment, he had confided that sum, and who kept it for him safely. These sixty thousand francs in assignats were the half of Sauviat's fortune at the time he came so near being guillotined. Brezac was also, at the same time, the faithful repository of the rest, namely, seven hundred louis d'or (an enormous sum at that time in gold), with which old Sauviat began his business once more as soon as he recovered his liberty. In thirty years each of those louis d'or had been transformed into a bank-note for a thousand francs, by means of the income from the Funds, of Madame Sauviat's inheritance from her father, old Champagnac, and of the profits accruing from the business and the accumulated interest thereon in the hands of the Brezac firm. Brezac himself had a loyal and honest friendship for Sauviat, – such as all Auvergnats are apt to feel for one another.

So, whenever Sauviat passed the front of the Graslin mansion he had said to himself, "Veronique shall live in that fine palace." He knew very well that no girl in all the department would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs as a marriage portion, besides the expectation of two hundred and fifty thousand more. Graslin, his chosen son-in-law, would therefore infallibly marry Veronique; and so, as we have seen, it came about.

Every evening Veronique had her fresh bunch of flowers, which on the morrow decked her little salon and was carefully concealed from the neighbors. She admired the beautiful jewels, the pearls and diamonds, the bracelets, the rubies, gifts which assuredly gratify all the daughters of Eve. She thought herself less plain when she wore them. She saw her mother happy in the marriage, and she had no other point of view from which to make comparisons. She was, moreover, totally ignorant of the duties or the purpose of marriage. She heard the solemn voice of the vicar of Saint-Etienne

praising Graslin to her as a man of honor, with whom she would lead an honorable life. Thus it was that Veronique consented to receive Monsieur Graslin as her future husband.

When it happens that in a life so withdrawn from the world, so solitary as that of Veronique, a single person enters it every day, that person cannot long remain indifferent; either he is hated, and the aversion, justified by a deepening knowledge of his character, renders him intolerable, or the habit of seeing bodily defects dims the eye to them. The mind looks about for compensations; his countenance awakens curiosity; its features brighten; fleeting beauties appear in it. At last the inner, hidden beneath the outer, shows itself. Then, when the first impressions are fairly overcome, the attachment felt is all the stronger, because the soul clings to it as its own creation. That is love. And here lies the reason of those passions conceived by beautiful things for other beings apparently ugly. The outward aspect, forgotten by affection, is no longer seen in a creature whose soul is deeply valued. Besides this, beauty, so necessary to a woman, takes many strange aspects in man; and there is as much diversity of feeling among women about the beauty of men as there is among men about the beauty of women. So, after deep reflection and much debating with herself, Veronique gave her consent to the publication of the banns.

From that moment all Limoges rang with this inexplicable affair, – inexplicable because no one knew the secret of it, namely, the immensity of the dowry. Had that dowry been known Veronique could have chosen a husband where she pleased; but even so, she might have made a mistake.

Graslin was thought to be much in love. Upholsterers came from Paris to fit up the house. Nothing was talked of in Limoges but the profuse expenditures of the banker. The value of the chandeliers was calculated; the gilding of the walls, the figures on the clocks, all were discussed; the jardinieres, the caloriferes, the objects of luxury and novelty, nothing was left unnoticed. In the garden of the hotel Graslin, above the icehouse, was an aviary, and all the inhabitants of the town were presently surprised by the sight of rare birds, – Chinese pheasants, mysterious breeds of ducks. Every one flocked to see them. Monsieur and Madame Grossetete, an old couple who were highly respected in Limoges, made several visits to the Sauviats, accompanied by Graslin. Madame Grossetete, a most excellent woman, congratulated Veronique on her happy marriage. Thus the Church, the family, society, and all material things down to the most trivial, made themselves accomplices to bring about this marriage.

In the month of April the formal invitations to the wedding were issued to all Graslin's friends and acquaintance. On a fine spring morning a caleche and a coupe, drawn by Limousin horses chosen by Monsieur Grossetete, drew up at eleven o'clock before the shop of the iron-dealer, bringing, to the great excitement of the neighborhood, the former partners of the bridegroom and the latter's two clerks. The street was lined with spectators, all anxious to see the Sauviats' daughter, on whose beautiful hair the most renowned hairdresser in Limoges had placed the bridal wreath and a costly veil of English lace. Veronique wore a gown of simple white muslin. A rather imposing assemblage of the most distinguished women in the society of the town attended the wedding in the cathedral, where the bishop, knowing the religious fervor of the Sauviats, deigned to marry Veronique himself. The bride was very generally voted plain.

She entered her new house, and went from one surprise to another. A grand dinner was to precede the ball, to which Graslin had invited nearly all Limoges. The dinner, given to the bishop, the prefect, the judge of the court, the attorney-general, the mayor, the general, and Graslin's former partners with their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all other persons who are simple and natural, showed charms that were not expected in her. Neither of the bridal pair could dance; Veronique continued therefore to do the honors to her guests, and to win the esteem and good graces of nearly all the persons who were presented to her, asking Grossetete, who took an honest liking to her, for information about the company. She made no mistakes and committed no blunders. It was during this evening that the two former partners of the banker announced the amount of the dowry (immense for Limousin) given by the Sauviats to their daughter. At nine o'clock the old iron-dealer

returned home and went to bed, leaving his wife to preside over the bride's retiring. It was said by everyone throughout the town that Madame Graslin was very plain, though well made.

Old Sauviat now wound up his business and sold his house in town. He bought a little country-place on the left bank of the Vienne between Limoges and Cluzeau, ten minutes' walk from the suburb of Saint-Martial, where he intended to finish his days tranquilly with his wife. The old couple had an apartment in the hotel Graslin and always dined once or twice a week with their daughter, who, as often, made their house in the country the object of her walks.

This enforced rest almost killed old Sauviat. Happily, Graslin found a means of occupying his father-in-law. In 1823 the banker was forced to take possession of a porcelain manufactory, to the proprietors of which he had advanced large sums, which they found themselves unable to repay except by the sale of their factory, which they made to him. By the help of his business connections and by investing a large amount of property in the concern, Graslin made it one of the finest manufactories of Limoges ware in the town. Afterwards he resold it at a fine profit; meantime he placed it under the superintendence of his father-in-law, who, in spite of his seventy-two years, counted for much in the return of prosperity to the establishment, who himself renewed his youth in the employment. Graslin was then able to attend to his legitimate business of banking without anxiety as to the manufactory.

Sauviat died in 1827 from an accident. While taking account of stock he fell into a *charasse*, – a sort of crate with an open grating in which the china was packed; his leg was slightly injured, so slightly that he paid no attention to it; gangrene set in; he would not consent to amputation, and therefore died. The widow gave up about two hundred and fifty thousand francs which came to her from Sauviat's estate, reserving only a stipend of two hundred francs a month, which amply sufficed for her wants. Graslin bound himself to pay her that sum duly. She kept her little house in the country, and lived there alone without a servant and against the remonstrances of her daughter, who could not induce her to alter this determination, to which she clung with the obstinacy peculiar to old persons. Madame Sauviat came nearly every day into Limoges to see her daughter, and the latter still continued to make her mother's house, from which was a charming view of the river, the object of her walks. From the road leading to it could be seen that island long loved by Veronique and called by her the Ile de France.

In order not to complicate our history of the Graslin household with the foregoing incidents, we have thought it best to end that of the Sauviats by anticipating events, which are moreover useful as explaining the private and hidden life which Madame Graslin now led. The old mother, noticing that Graslin's miserliness, which returned upon him, might hamper her daughter, was for some time unwilling to resign the property left to her by her husband. But Veronique, unable to imagine a case in which a woman might desire the use of her own property, urged it upon her mother with reasons of great generosity, and out of gratitude to Graslin for restoring to her the liberty and freedom of a young girl. But this is anticipating.

The unusual splendor which accompanied Graslin's marriage had disturbed all his habits and constantly annoyed him. The mind of the great financier was a very small one. Veronique had had no means of judging the man with whom she was to pass her life. During his fifty-five visits he had let her see nothing but the business man, the indefatigable worker, who conceived and sustained great enterprises, and analyzed public affairs, bringing them always to the crucial test of the Bank. Fascinated by the million offered to him by Sauviat, he showed himself generous by calculation. Carried away by the interests of his marriage and by what he called his "folly," namely, the house which still goes by the name of the hotel Graslin, he did things on a large scale. Having bought horses, a caleche, and a coupe, he naturally used them to return the wedding visits and go to those dinners and balls, called the "retours de noces," which the heads of the administration and the rich families of Limoges gave to the newly married pair. Under this impulsion, which carried him entirely out of his natural sphere, Graslin sent to Paris for a man-cook and took a reception day. For a year he kept the pace of a man who possesses a fortune of sixteen hundred thousand francs, and he became of

course the most noted personage in Limoges. During this year he generously put into his wife's purse every month twenty-five gold pieces of twenty francs each.

Society concerned itself much about Veronique from the day of her marriage, for she was a boon to its curiosity, which has little to feed on in the provinces. Veronique was all the more studied because she had appeared in the social world like a phenomenon; but once there, she remained always simple and modest, in the attitude of a person who is observing habits, customs, manners, things unknown to her, and endeavoring to conform to them. Already voted ugly but well-shaped, she was now declared kindly but stupid. She was learning so many things, she had so much to hear and to see that her looks and speech did certainly give some reason for this judgment. She showed a sort of torpor which resembled lack of mind. Marriage, that hard calling, as she said, for which the Church, the Code, and her mother exhorted her to resignation and obedience, under pain of transgressing all human laws and causing irreparable evil, threw her into a dazed and dizzy condition, which amounted sometimes to a species of inward delirium.

Silent and self-contained, she listened as much to herself as she did to others. Feeling within her the most violent "difficulty of existing," to use an expression of Fontenelle's, which was constantly increasing, she became terrified at herself. Nature resisted the commands of the mind, the body denied the will. The poor creature, caught in the net, wept on the breast of that great Mother of the poor and the afflicted, – she went for comfort to the Church; her piety redoubled, she confided the assaults of the demon to her confessor; she prayed to heaven for succor. Never, at any period of her life, did she fulfil her religious duties with such fervor. The despair of not loving her husband flung her violently at the foot of the altar, where divine and consolatory voices urged her to patience. She was patient, she was gentle, and she continued to live on, hoping always for the happiness of maternity.

"Did you notice Madame Graslin this morning?" the women would say to each other. "Marriage doesn't agree with her; she is actually green."

"Yes," some of them would reply; "but would you give your daughter to a man like Graslin? No woman could marry him with impunity."

Now that Graslin was married, all the mothers who had courted him for ten years past pursued him with sarcasms.

Veronique grew visibly thinner and really ugly; her eyes looked weary, her features coarsened, her manner was shy and awkward; she acquired that air of cold and melancholy rigidity for which the ultra-pious are so often blamed. Her skin took on a grayish tone; she dragged herself languidly about during this first year of married life, ordinarily so brilliant for a young wife. She tried to divert her mind by reading, profiting by the liberty of married women to read what they please. She read the novels of Walter Scott, the poems of Lord Byron, the works of Schiller and of Goethe, and much else of modern and also ancient literature. She learned to ride a horse, and to dance and to draw. She painted water-colors and made sepia sketches, turning ardently to all those resources which women employ to bear the weariness of their solitude. She gave herself that second education which most women derive from a man, but which she derived from herself only.

The natural superiority of a free, sincere spirit, brought up, as it were in a desert and strengthened by religion, had given her a sort of untrammelled grandeur and certain needs, to which the provincial world she lived in offered no sustenance. All books pictured Love to her, and she sought for the evidence of its existence, but nowhere could she see the passion of which she read. Love was in her heart, like seeds in the earth, awaiting the action of the sun. Her deep melancholy, caused by constant meditation on herself, brought her back by hidden by-ways to the brilliant dreams of her girlish days. Many a time she must have lived again that old romantic poem, making herself both the actor and the subject of it. Again she saw that island bathed in light, flowery, fragrant, caressing to her soul. Often her pallid eyes wandered around a salon with piercing curiosity. The men were all like Graslin. She studied them, and then she seemed to question their wives; but nothing on the faces of those women revealed an inward anguish like to hers, and she returned home sad and gloomy and

distressed about herself. The authors she had read in the morning answered to the feelings in her soul; their thoughts pleased her; but at night she heard only empty words, not even presented in a lively way, – dull, empty, foolish conversations in petty local matters, or personalities of no interest to her. She was often surprised at the heat displayed in discussions which concerned no feeling or sentiment – to her the essence of existence, the soul of life.

Often she was seen with fixed eyes, mentally absorbed, thinking no doubt of the days of her youthful ignorance spent in that chamber full of harmonies now forever passed away. She felt a horrible repugnance against dropping into the gulf of pettiness in which the women among whom she lived were floundering. This repugnance, stamped on her forehead, on her lips, and ill-disguised, was taken for the insolence of a parvenue. Madame Graslin began to observe on all faces a certain coldness; she felt in all remarks an acrimony, the causes of which were unknown to her, for she had no intimate friend to enlighten or advise her. Injustice, which angers little minds, brings loftier souls to question themselves, and communicates a species of humility to them. Veronique condemned herself, endeavoring to see her own faults. She tried to be affable; they called her false. She grew more gentle still; they said she was a hypocrite, and her pious devotion helped on the calumny. She spent money, gave dinners and balls, and they taxed her with pride.

Unsuccessful in all these attempts, unjustly judged, rebuffed by the petty and tormenting pride which characterizes provincial society, where each individual is armed with pretensions and their attendant uneasiness, Madame Graslin fell back into utter solitude. She returned with eagerness to the arms of the Church. Her great soul, clothed with so weak a flesh, showed her the multiplied commandments of Catholicism as so many stones placed for protection along the precipices of life, so many props brought by charitable hands to sustain human weakness on its weary way; and she followed, with greater rigor than ever, even the smallest religious practices.

On this the liberals of the town classed Madame Graslin among the *devotes*, the ultras. To the different animosities Veronique had innocently acquired, the virulence of party feeling now added its periodical exasperation. But as this ostracism took nothing really from her, she quietly left society and lived in books which offered her such infinite resources. She meditated on what she read, she compared systems, she widened immeasurably the horizons of her intellect and the extent of her education; in this way she opened the gates of her soul to curiosity.

During this period of resolute study, in which religion supported and maintained her mind, she obtained the friendship of Monsieur Grossetete, one of those old men whose mental superiority grows rusty in provincial life, but who, when they come in contact with an eager mind, recover something of their former brilliancy. The good man took an earnest interest in Veronique, who, to reward him for the flattering warmth of heart which old men show to those they like, displayed before him, and for the first time in her life, the treasures of her soul and the acquirements of her mind, cultivated so secretly, and now full of blossom. An extract from a letter written by her about this time to Monsieur Grossetete will show the condition of the mind of a woman who was later to give signal proofs of a firm and lofty nature: —

> "The flowers you sent me for the ball were charming, but they suggested harsh reflections. Those pretty creatures gathered by you, and doomed to wilt upon my bosom to adorn a fete, made me think of others that live and die unseen in the depths of your woods, their fragrance never inhaled by any one. I asked myself why I was dancing there, why I was decked with flowers, just as I ask God why he has placed me to live in this world.
>
> "You see, my friend, all is a snare to the unhappy; the smallest matter brings the sick mind back to its woes; but the greatest evil of certain woes is the persistency which makes them a fixed idea pervading our lives. A constant sorrow ought rather to be a divine inspiration. You love flowers for themselves, whereas I love them as I love to listen to fine music. So, as I was saying, the secret of a mass of things

escapes me. You, my old friend, you have a passion, – that of the horticulturist. When you return to town inspire me with that taste, so that I may rush to my greenhouse with eager feet, as you go to yours to watch the development of your plants, to bud and bloom with them, to admire what you create, – the new colors, the unexpected varieties, which expand and grow beneath your eyes by the virtue of your care.

"My greenhouse, the one I watch, is filled with suffering souls. The miseries I try to lessen sadden my heart; and when I take them upon myself, when, after finding some young woman without clothing for her babe, some old man wanting bread, I have supplied their needs, the emotions their distress and its relief have caused me do not suffice my soul. Ah, friend, I feel within me untold powers – for evil, possibly, – which nothing can lower, which the sternest commands of our religion are unable to abase! Sometimes, when I go to see my mother, walking alone among the fields, I want to cry aloud, and I do so. It seems to me that my body is a prison in which some evil genius is holding a shuddering creature while awaiting the mysterious words which are to burst its obstructive form.

"But that comparison is not a just one. In me it seems to be the body that seeks escape, if I may say so. Religion fills my soul, books and their riches occupy my mind. Why, then, do I desire some anguish which shall destroy the enervating peace of my existence?

"Oh, if some sentiment, some mania that I could cultivate, does not come into my life, I feel I shall sink at last into the gulf where all ideas are dulled, where character deteriorates, motives slacken, virtues lose their backbone, and all the forces of the soul are scattered, – a gulf in which I shall no longer be the being Nature meant me to be!

"This is what my bitter complainings mean. But do not let them hinder you from sending me those flowers. Your friendship is so soothing and so full of loving kindness that it has for the last few months almost reconciled me to myself. Yes, it makes me happy to have you cast a glance upon my soul, at once so barren and so full of bloom; and I am thankful for every gentle word you say to one who rides the phantom steed of dreams, and returns worn-out."

At the end of the third year of his married life, Graslin, observing that his wife no longer used her horses, and finding a good market for them, sold them. He also sold the carriages, sent away the coachman, let the bishop have his man-cook, and contented himself with a woman. He no longer gave the monthly sum to his wife, telling her that he would pay all bills. He thought himself the most fortunate of husbands in meeting no opposition whatever to these proceedings from the woman who had brought him a million of francs as a dowry. Madame Graslin, brought up from childhood without ever seeing money, or being made to feel that it was an indispensable element in life, deserved no praise whatever for this apparent generosity. Graslin even noticed in a corner of the secretary all the sums he had ever given her, less the money she had bestowed in charity or spent upon her dress, the cost of which was much lessened by the profusion of her wedding trousseau.

Graslin boasted of Veronique to all Limoges as being a model wife. He next regretted the money spent on the house, and he ordered the furniture to be all packed away or covered up. His wife's bedroom, dressing-room, and boudoir were alone spared from these protective measures; which protect nothing, for furniture is injured just as much by being covered up as by being left uncovered. Graslin himself lived almost entirely on the ground-floor of the house, where he had his office, and resumed his old business habits with avidity. He thought himself an excellent husband because he went upstairs to breakfast and dined with his wife; but his unpunctuality was so great that it was not more than ten times a month that he began a meal with he; he had exacted, out of courtesy, that she should never wait for him. Veronique did, however, always remain in the room while her husband

took his meals, serving him herself, that she might at least perform voluntarily some of the visible obligations of a wife.

The banker, to whom the things of marriage were very indifferent, and who had seen nothing in his wife but seven hundred and fifty thousand francs, had never once perceived Veronique's repugnance to him. Little by little he now abandoned Madame Graslin for his business. When he wished to put a bed in the room adjoining his office on the ground-floor, Veronique hastened to comply with the request. So that three years after their marriage these two ill-assorted beings returned to their original estate, each equally pleased and happy to do so. The moneyed man, possessing eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned with all the more eagerness to his old avaricious habits because he had momentarily quitted them. His two clerks and the office-boy were better lodged and rather better fed, and that was the only difference between the present and the past. His wife had a cook and maid (two indispensable servants); but except for the actual necessities of life, not a penny left his coffers for his household.

Happy in the turn which things were now taking, Veronique saw in the evident satisfaction of the banker the absolution for this separation which she would never have asked for herself. She had no conception that she was as disagreeable to Graslin as Graslin was repulsive to her. This secret divorce made her both sad and joyful. She had always looked to motherhood for an interest in life; but up to this time (1828) the couple had had no prospect of a family.

IV. THE HISTORY OF MANY MARRIED WOMEN IN THE PROVINCES

So now, in her magnificent house and envied for her wealth by all the town, Madame Graslin recovered the solitude of her early years in her father's house, less the glow of hope and the youthful joys of ignorance. She lived among the ruins of her castles in the air, enlightened by sad experience, sustained by religious faith, occupied by the care of the poor, whom she loaded with benefits. She made clothes for the babies, gave mattresses and sheets to those who slept on straw; she went among the poor herself, followed by her maid, a girl from Auvergne whom her mother procured for her, and who attached herself body and soul to her mistress. Veronique made an honorable spy of her, sending her to discover the places where suffering could be stilled, poverty softened.

This active benevolence, carried on with strict attention to religious duties, was hidden in the deepest secrecy and directed by the various rectors in the town, with whom Veronique had a full understanding in all her charitable deeds, so as not to suffer the money so needed for unmerited misfortunes to fall into the hands of vice. It was during this period of her life that she won a friendship quite as strong and quite as precious as that of old Grossetete. She became the beloved lamb of a distinguished priest, who was persecuted for his true merits, which were wholly misunderstood, one of the two grand-vicars of the diocese, named the Abbe Dutheil.

This priest belonged to the portion of the French clergy who incline toward certain concessions, who would be glad to associate the Church with the people's interests, and so enable it to regain, through the application of true evangelical doctrine, its former influence over the masses, which it might then draw to closer relations with the monarchy. Whether it was that the Abbe Dutheil recognized the impossibility of enlightening the court of Rome and the higher clergy on this point, or that he had consented to sacrifice his own opinions to those of his superiors, it is certain that he remained within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, being very well aware that any manifestation of his principles at the present time would deprive him of all chance of the episcopate.

This eminent priest united in himself great Christian modesty and a noble character. Without pride or ambition he remained at his post and did his duty in the midst of perils. The liberals of the town were ignorant of the motives of his conduct; they claimed him as being of their opinions and considered him a patriot, – a word which meant revolutionist in Catholic minds. Loved by his inferiors, who dared not, however, proclaim his merits, feared by his equals who kept watch upon him, he was a source of embarrassment to the bishop. His virtues and his knowledge, envied, no doubt, prevented persecution; it was impossible to complain of him, though he criticized frankly the political blunders by which both the throne and the clergy mutually compromised themselves. He often foretold results, but vainly, – like poor Cassandra, who was equally cursed before and after the disaster she predicted. Short of a revolution the Abbe Dutheil was likely to remain as he was, one of those stones hidden in the foundation wall on which the edifice rests. His utility was recognized and they left him in his place, like many other solid minds whose rise to power is the terror of mediocrities. If, like the Abbe de Lamennais, he had taken up his pen he would doubtless, like him, have been blasted by the court of Rome.

The Abbe Dutheil was imposing in appearance. His exterior revealed the underlying of a profound nature always calm and equable on the surface. His tall figure and its thinness did not detract from the general effect of his lines, which recalled those by which the genius of Spanish painters delights to represent the great monastic meditators, and those selected at a later period by Thorwaldsen for the Apostles. The long, almost rigid folds of the face, in harmony with those of his vestment, had the charm which the middle-ages bring into relief in the mystical statues placed beside the portals of their churches. Gravity of thought, word, and accent, harmonized in this man

and became him well. Seeing his dark eyes hollowed by austerities and surrounded by a brown circle; seeing, too, his forehead, yellow as some old stone, his head and hands almost fleshless, men desired to hear the voice and the instructions which issued from his lips. This purely physical grandeur which accords with moral grandeur, gave this priest a somewhat haughty and disdainful air, which was instantly counteracted to an observer by his modesty and by his speech, though it did not predispose others in his favor. In some more elevated station these advantages would have obtained that necessary ascendancy over the masses which the people willingly allow to men who are thus endowed. But superiors will not forgive their inferiors for possessing the externals of greatness, nor for displaying that majesty so prized by the ancients but so often lacking to the administrators of modern power.

By one of those strange freaks of circumstance which are never accounted for, the other vicar-general, the Abbe de Grancour, a stout little man with a rosy complexion and blue eyes, whose opinions were diametrically opposed to those of the Abbe Dutheil, liked to be in the latter's company, although he never testified this liking enough to put himself out of the good graces of the bishop, to whom he would have sacrificed everything. The Abbe de Grancour believed in the merit of his colleague, recognized his talents, secretly accepted his doctrines, and condemned them openly; for the little priest was one of those men whom superiority attracts and intimidates, – who dislike it and yet cultivate it. "He would embrace me and condemn me," the Abbe Dutheil said of him. The Abbe de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies; he was therefore likely to live and die a vicar-general. He said he was drawn to visit Madame Graslin by the desire of counselling so religious and benevolent a person; and the bishop approved of his doing so, – Monsieur de Grancour's real object being to spend a few evenings with the Abbe Dutheil in Veronique's salon.

The two priests now came pretty regularly to see Madame Graslin, and make her a sort of report about her poor and discuss the best means of succoring and improving them. But Monsieur Graslin had now begun to tighten his purse-strings, having made the discovery, in spite of the innocent deceptions of his wife and her maid, that the money he paid did not go solely for household expenses and for dress. He was angry when he found out how much money his wife's charities cost him; he called the cook to account, inquired into all the details of the housekeeping, and showed what a grand administrator he was by practically proving that his house could be splendidly kept for three thousand francs a year. Then he put his wife on an allowance of a hundred francs a month, and boasted of his liberality in so doing. The office-boy, who liked flowers, was made to take care of the garden on Sundays. Having dismissed the gardener, Graslin used the greenhouse to store articles conveyed to him as security for loans. He let the birds in the aviary die for want of care, to avoid the cost of their food and attendance. And he even took advantage of a winter when there was no ice, to give up his icehouse and save the expense of filling it.

By 1828 there was not a single article of luxury in the house which he had not in some way got rid of. Parsimony reigned unchecked in the hotel Graslin. The master's face, greatly improved during the three years spent with his wife (who induced him to follow his physician's advice), now became redder, more fiery, more blotched than before. Business had taken such proportions that it was necessary to promote the boy-of-all-work to the position of cashier, and to find some stout Auvergnat for the rougher service of the hotel Graslin.

Thus, four years after her marriage, this very rich woman could not dispose of a single penny by her own will. The avarice of her husband succeeded the avarice of her parents. Madame Graslin had never understood the necessity of money until the time came when her benevolence was checked.

By the beginning of the year 1828 Veronique had entirely recovered the blooming health which had given such beauty to the innocent young girl sitting at her window in the old house in the rue de la Cite; but by this time she had acquired a fine literary education, and was fully able to think and to speak. An excellent judgment gave real depth to her words. Accustomed now to the little things of life, she wore the fashions of the period with infinite grace. When she chanced about this time to visit a salon she found herself – not without a certain inward surprise – received by all with respectful

esteem. These changed feelings and this welcome were due to the two vicars-general and to old Grossetete. Informed by them of her noble hidden life, and the good deeds so constantly done in their midst, the bishop and a few influential persons spoke of Madame Graslin as a flower of true piety, a violet fragrant with virtues; in consequence of which, one of those strong reactions set in, unknown to Veronique, which are none the less solid and durable because they are long in coming. This change in public opinion gave additional influence to Veronique's salon, which was now visited by all the chief persons in the society of the town, in consequence of certain circumstances we shall now relate.

Toward the close of this year the young Vicomte de Grandville was sent as deputy solicitor to the courts of Limoges. He came preceded by a reputation always given to Parisians in the provinces. A few days after his arrival, during a soiree at the prefecture, he made answer to a rather foolish question, that the most able, intelligent, and distinguished woman he had met in the town was Madame Graslin.

"Perhaps you think her the handsomest also?" said the wife of the receiver-general.

"I cannot think so in your presence, madame," he replied, "and therefore I am in doubt. Madame Graslin possesses a beauty which need inspire no jealousy, for it seldom shows itself: she is only beautiful to those she loves; you are beautiful to all the world. When Madame Graslin's soul is moved by true enthusiasm, it sheds an expression upon her face which changes it completely. Her countenance is like a landscape, – dull in winter, glorious in summer; but the world will always see it in winter. When she talks with friends on some literary or philosophical topic, or on certain religious questions which interest her, she is roused into appearing suddenly an unknown woman of marvellous beauty."

This declaration, which was caused by observing the phenomenon that formerly made Veronique so beautiful on her return from the holy table, made a great noise in Limoges, where for a time the young deputy, to whom the place of the *procureur-general* was said to be promised, played a leading part. In all provincial towns a man who rises a trifle above others becomes, for a period more or less protracted, the object of a liking which resembles enthusiasm, and which usually deceives the object of this ephemeral worship. It is to this social caprice that we owe so many local geniuses, soon ignored and their false reputations mortified. The men whom women make the fashion in this way are oftener strangers than compatriots.

In this particular case the admirers of the Vicomte de Grandville were not mistaken; he was in truth a superior man. Madame Graslin was the only woman he found in Limoges with whom he could exchange ideas and keep up a varied conversation. A few months after his arrival, attracted by the increasing charm of Veronique's manners and conversation, he proposed to the Abbe Dutheil, and a few other of the remarkable men in Limoges, to meet in the evenings at Madame Graslin's house and play whist. At this time Madame Graslin was at home five evenings in the week to visitors, reserving two free days, as she said, for herself.

When Madame Graslin had thus gathered about her the distinguished men we have mentioned, others were not sorry to give themselves the reputation of cleverness by seeking to join the same society. Veronique also received three or four of the distinguished officers of the garrison and staff; but the freedom of mind displayed by her guests, and the tacit discretion enjoined by the manners of the best society, made her extremely cautious as to the admission of those who now vied with each other to obtain her invitations.

The other women in this provincial society were not without jealousy in seeing Madame Graslin surrounded by the most agreeable and distinguished men in the town; but by this time Veronique's social power was all the stronger because it was exclusive; she accepted the intimacy of four or five women only, and these were strangers in Limoges who had come from Paris with their husbands, and who held in horror the petty gossip of provincial life. If any one outside of this little clique of superior persons came in to make a visit, the conversation immediately changed, and the habitues of the house talked commonplace.

The hotel Graslin thus became an oasis where intelligent minds found relaxation and relief from the dulness of provincial life; where persons connected with the government could express themselves freely on politics without fear of having their words taken down and repeated; where all could satirize that which provoked satire, and where each individual abandoned his professional trammels and yielded himself up to his natural self.

So, after being the most obscure young girl in all Limoges, considered ugly, dull, and vacant, Madame Graslin, at the beginning of the year 1828, was regarded as one of the leading personages in the town, and the most noted woman in society. No one went to see her in the mornings, for all knew her habits of benevolence and the regularity of her religious observances. She always went to early mass so as not to delay her husband's breakfast, for which, however, there was no fixed hour, though she never failed to be present and to serve it herself. Graslin had trained his wife to this little ceremony. He continued to praise her on all occasions; he thought her perfect; she never asked him for anything; he could pile up louis upon louis, and spread his investments over a wide field of enterprise through his relations with the Brezacs; he sailed with a fair wind and well freighted over the ocean of commerce, – his intense business interest keeping him in the still, though half-intoxicated, frenzy of gamblers watching events on the green table of speculation.

During this happy period, and until the beginning of the year 1829, Madame Graslin attained, in the eyes of her friends, to a degree of beauty that was really extraordinary, the reasons of which they were unable to explain. The blue of the iris expanded like a flower, diminishing the dark circle of the pupil, and seeming to float in a liquid and languishing light that was full of love. Her forehead, illumined by thoughts and memories of happiness, was seen to whiten like the zenith before the dawn, and its lines were purified by an inward fire. Her face lost those heated brown tones which betoken a disturbance of the liver, – that malady of vigorous constitutions, or of persons whose soul is distressed and whose affections are thwarted. Her temples became adorably fresh and pure; gleams of the celestial face of a Raffaelle showed themselves now and then in hers, – a face hitherto obscured by the malady of grief, as the canvas of the great master is encrusted by time. Her hands seemed whiter; her shoulders took on an exquisite fulness; her graceful, animated movements gave to her supple figure its utmost charm.

The Limoges women accused her of being in love with Monsieur de Grandville, who certainly paid her assiduous attention, to which Veronique opposed all the barriers of a conscientious resistance. The viscount professed for her one of those respectful attachments which did not blind the habitual visitors of her salon. The priests and men of sense saw plainly that this affection, which was love on the part of the young man, did not go beyond the permissible line in Madame Graslin. Weary at last of a resistance based on religious principle, the Vicomte de Grandville consoled himself (to the knowledge of his intimates) with other and easier friendships; which did not, however, lessen his constant admiration and worship of the beautiful Madame Graslin, – such was the term by which she was designated in 1829.

The most clear-sighted among those who surrounded her attributed the change which rendered Veronique increasingly charming to her friends to the secret delight which all women, even the most religious, feel when they see themselves courted; and to the satisfaction of living at last in a circle congenial to her mind, where the pleasure of exchanging ideas and the happiness of being surrounded by intelligent and well-informed men and true friends, whose attachment deepened day by day, had dispersed forever the weary dulness of her life.

Perhaps, however, closer, more perceptive or sceptical observers were needed than those who frequented the hotel Graslin, to detect the barbaric grandeur, the plebeian force of the People which lay deep-hidden in her soul. If sometimes her friends surprised her in a torpor of meditation either gloomy or merely pensive, they knew she bore upon her heart the miseries of others, and had doubtless that morning been initiated in some fresh sorrow, or had penetrated to some haunt where vices terrify the soul with their candor.

The viscount, now promoted to be *procureur-general*, would occasionally blame her for certain unintelligent acts of charity by which, as he knew from his secret police-reports, she had given encouragement to criminal schemes.

"If you ever want money for any of your paupers, let me be a sharer in your good deeds," said old Grossetete, taking Veronique's hand.

"Ah!" she replied with a sigh, "it is impossible to make everybody rich."

At the beginning of this year an event occurred which was destined to change the whole interior life of this woman and to transform the splendid expression of her countenance into something far more interesting in the eyes of painters.

Becoming uneasy about his health, Graslin, to his wife's despair, no longer desired to live on the ground-floor. He returned to the conjugal chamber and allowed himself to be nursed. The news soon spread throughout Limoges that Madame Graslin was pregnant. Her sadness, mingled with joy, struck the minds of her friends, who then for the first time perceived that in spite of her virtues she had been happy in the fact of living separate from her husband. Perhaps she had hoped for some better fate ever since the time when, as it was known, the attorney-general had declined to marry the richest heiress in the place, in order to keep his loyalty to her.

From this suggestion there grew up in the minds of the profound politicians who played their whist at the hotel Graslin a belief that the viscount and the young wife had based certain hopes on the ill-health of the banker which were now frustrated. The great agitations which marked this period of Veronique's life, the anxieties which a first childbirth causes in every woman, and which, it is said, threatens special danger when she is past her first youth, made her friends more attentive than ever to her; they vied with each other in showing her those little kindnesses which proved how warm and solid their affection really was.

V. TASCHERON

It was in this year that Limoges witnessed a terrible event and the singular drama of the Tascheron trial, in which the young Vicomte de Grandville displayed the talents which afterwards made him *procureur-general*.

An old man living in a lonely house in the suburb of Saint-Etienne was murdered. A large fruit-garden lay between the road and the house, which was also separated from the adjoining fields by a pleasure-garden, at the farther end of which were several old and disused greenhouses. In front of the house a rapid slope to the river bank gave a view of the Vienne. The courtyard, which also sloped downward, ended at a little wall, from which small columns rose at equal distances united by a railing, more, however, for ornament than protection, for the bars of the railing were of painted wood.

The old man, named Pingret, noted for his avarice, lived with a single woman-servant, a country-girl who did all the work of the house. He himself took care of his espaliers, trimmed his trees, gathered his fruit, and sent it to Limoges for sale, together with early vegetables, in the raising of which he excelled.

The niece of this old man, and his sole heiress, married to a gentleman of small means living in Limoges, a Madame des Vanneaulx, had again and again urged her uncle to hire a man to protect the house, pointing out to him that he would thus obtain the profits of certain uncultivated ground where he now grew nothing but clover. But the old man steadily refused. More than once a discussion on the subject had cut into the whist-playing of Limoges. A few shrewd heads declared that the old miser buried his gold in that clover-field.

"If I were Madame des Vanneaulx," said a wit, "I shouldn't torment my uncle about it; if somebody murders him, why, let him be murdered! I should inherit the money."

Madame des Vanneaulx, however, wanted to keep her uncle, after the manner of the managers of the Italian Opera, who entreat their popular tenor to wrap up his throat, and give him their cloak if he happens to have forgotten his own. She had sent old Pingret a fine English mastiff, which Jeanne Malassis, the servant-woman brought back the next day saying: —

"Your uncle doesn't want another mouth to feed."

The result proved how well-founded were the niece's fears. Pingret was murdered on a dark night, in the middle of his clover-field, where he may have been adding a few coins to a buried pot of gold. The servant-woman, awakened by the struggle, had the courage to go to the assistance of the old miser, and the murderer was under the necessity of killing her to suppress her testimony. This necessity, which frequently causes murderers to increase the number of their victims, is an evil produced by the fear of the death penalty.

This double murder was attended by curious circumstances which told as much for the prosecution as for the defence. After the neighbors had missed seeing the little old Pingret and his maid for a whole morning and had gazed at his house through the wooden railings as they passed it, and seen that, contrary to custom, the doors and windows were still closed, an excitement began in the Faubourg Saint-Etienne which presently reached the rue de la Cloche, where Madame des Vanneaulx resided.

The niece was always in expectation of some such catastrophe, and she at once notified the officers of the law, who went to the house and broke in the gate. They soon discovered in a clover patch four holes, and near two of these holes lay the fragments of earthenware pots, which had doubtless been full of gold the night before. In the other two holes, scarcely covered up, were the bodies of old Pingret and Jeanne Malassis, who had been buried with their clothes on. The poor girl had run to her master's assistance in her night-gown, with bare feet.

While the *procureur-du-roi*, the commissary of police, and the examining magistrate were gathering all particulars for the basis of their action, the luckless des Vanneaulx picked up the broken

pots and calculated from their capacity the sum lost. The magistrates admitted the correctness of their calculations and entered the sum stolen on their records as, in all probability, a thousand gold coins to each pot. But were these coins forty-eight or forty, twenty-four or twenty francs in value? All expectant heirs in Limoges sympathized with the des Vanneaulx. The Limousin imagination was greatly stirred by the spectacle of the broken pots. As for old Pingret, who often sold vegetables himself in the market, lived on bread and onions, never spent more than three hundred francs a year, obliged and disobliged no one, and had never done one atom of good in the suburb of Saint-Etienne where he lived, his death did not excite the slightest regret. Poor Jeanne Malassis' heroism, which the old miser, had she saved him, would certainly not have rewarded, was thought rash; the number of souls who admired it was small in comparison with those who said: "For my part, I should have stayed in my bed."

The police found neither pen nor ink wherewith to write their report in the bare, dilapidated, cold, and dismal house. Observing persons and the heir might then have noticed a curious inconsistency which may be seen in certain misers. The dread the little old man had of the slightest outlay showed itself in the non-repaired roof which opened its sides to the light and the rain and snow; in the cracks of the walls; in the rotten doors ready to fall at the slightest shock; in the windows, where the broken glass was replaced by paper not even oiled. All the windows were without curtains, the fireplaces without mirrors or andirons; the hearth was garnished with one log of wood and a few little sticks almost caked with the soot which had fallen down the chimney. There were two rickety chairs, two thin couches, a few cracked pots and mended plates, a one-armed armchair, a dilapidated bed, the curtains of which time had embroidered with a bold hand, a worm-eaten secretary where the miser kept his seeds, a pile of linen thickened by many darns, and a heap of ragged garments, which existed only by the will of their master; he being dead they dropped into shreds, powder, chemical dissolution, in fact I know not into what form of utter ruin, as soon as the heir or the officers of the law laid rough hands upon them; they disappeared as if afraid of being publicly sold.

The population at Limoges was much concerned for these worthy des Vanneaulx, who had two children; and yet, no sooner did the law lay hands upon the reputed doer of the crime than the guilty personage absorbed attention, became a hero, and the des Vanneaulx were relegated into a corner of the picture.

Toward the end of March Madame Graslin began to feel some of those pains which precede a first confinement and cannot be concealed. The inquiry as to the murder was then going on, but the murderer had not as yet been arrested.

Veronique now received her friends in her bedroom, where they played whist. For several days past Madame Graslin had not left the house, and she seemed to be tormented by several of those caprices attributed to women in her condition. Her mother came to see her almost every day, and the two women remained for hours in consultation.

It was nine o'clock, and the card tables were still without players, for every one was talking of the murder. Monsieur de Grandville entered the room.

"We have arrested the murderer of old Pingret," he said, joyfully.

"Who is it?" was asked on all sides.

"A porcelain workman; a man whose character has always been excellent, and who was in a fair way to make his fortune. He worked in your husband's old factory," added Monsieur de Grandville, turning to Madame Graslin.

"What is his name?" asked Veronique, in a weak voice.

"Jean-Francois Tascheron."

"Unhappy man!" she answered. "Yes, I have often seen him; my poor father recommended him to my care as some one to be looked after."

"He left the factory before Sauviat's death," said her mother, "and went to that of Messrs. Philippart, who offered him higher wages – But my daughter is scarcely well enough for this exciting conversation," she added, calling attention to Madame Graslin, whose face was as white as her sheets.

After that evening Mere Sauviat gave up her own home, and came, in spite of her sixty-six years, to stay with her daughter and nurse her through her confinement. She never left the room; Madame Graslin's friends found the old woman always at the bed's head busy with her eternal knitting, – brooding over Veronique as she did when the girl had the small-pox, answering questions for her and often refusing to admit visitors. The maternal and filial love of mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that these actions of Madame Sauviat caused no comment.

A few days later, when the viscount, thinking to amuse the invalid, began to relate details which the whole town were eagerly demanding about Jean-Francois Tascheron, Madame Sauviat again stopped him hastily, declaring that he would give her daughter bad dreams. Veronique, however, looking fixedly at Monsieur de Grandville, asked him to finish what he was saying. Thus her friends, and she herself, were the first to know the results of the preliminary inquiry, which would soon be made public. The following is a brief epitome of the facts on which the indictment found against the prisoner was based.

Jean-Francois Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a family, who lived in the village of Montegnac.

Twenty years before this crime, which was famous throughout the Limousin, the canton of Montegnac was known for its evil ways. The saying was proverbial in Limoges that out of one hundred criminals in the department fifty belonged to the arrondissement of Montegnac. Since 1816, however, two years after a priest named Bonnet was sent there as rector, it had lost its bad reputation, and the inhabitants no longer sent their heavy contingent to the assizes. This change was widely attributed to the influence acquired by the rector, Monsieur Bonnet, over a community which had lately been a hotbed for evil-minded persons whose actions dishonored the whole region. The crime of Jean-Francois Tascheron brought back upon Montegnac its former ill-savor.

By a curious trick of chance, the Taschерons were almost the only family in this village community who had retained through its evil period the old rigid morals and religious habits which are noticed by the observers of to-day to be rapidly disappearing throughout the country districts. This family had therefore formed a point of reliance to the rector, who naturally bore it on his heart. The Taschерons, remarkable for their uprightness, their union, their love of work, had never given other than good examples to Jean-Francois. Induced by the praiseworthy ambition of earning his living by a trade, the lad had left his native village, to the regret of his parents and friends, who greatly loved him, and had come to Limoges. During his two years' apprenticeship in a porcelain factory, his conduct was worthy of all praise; no apparent ill-conduct had led up to the horrible crime which was now to end his life. On the contrary, Jean-Francois Tascheron had given the time which other workmen were in the habit of spending in wine-shops and debauchery to study and self-improvement.

The most searching and minute inquiry on the part of the provincial authorities (who have plenty of time on their hands) failed to throw any light on the secrets of the young man's life. When the mistress of the humble lodging-house in which he lived was questioned she said she had never had a lodger whose moral conduct was as blameless. He was naturally amiable and gentle, and sometimes gay. About a year before the commission of the crime, his habits changed: he slept away from home several times a month and often for consecutive nights; but where she did not know, though she thought, from the state of his shoes when he returned, that he must have been into the country. She noticed that although he appeared to have left the town, he never wore his heavy boots, but always a pair of light shoes. He shaved before starting, and put on clean linen. Hearing this, the police turned their attention to houses of ill-fame and questionable resorts; but Jean-Francois Tascheron was found to be wholly unknown among them. The authorities then made a search through the working-girl and *grisette* class; but none of these women had had relations with the accused.

A crime without a motive is unheard of, especially in a young man whose desire for education and whose laudable ambition gave him higher ideas and a superior judgment to that of other workmen. The police and the examining justice, finding themselves balked in the above directions, attributed the murder to a passion for gambling; but after the most searching inquiries it was proved that Tascheron never played cards.

At first Jean-Francois entrenched himself in a system of flat denials, which, of course, in presence of a jury, would fall before proof; they seemed to show the collusion of some person either well versed in law or gifted with an intelligent mind. The following are the chief proofs the prosecution were prepared to present, and they are, as is frequently the case in trials for murder, both important and trifling; to wit: —

The absence of Tascheron during the night of the crime, and his refusal to say where he was, for the accused did not offer to set up an alibi; a fragment of his blouse, torn off by the servant-woman in the struggle, found close by on a tree to which the wind had carried it; his presence that evening near Pingret's house, which was noticed by passers and by persons living in the neighborhood, though it might not have been remembered unless for the crime; a false key made by Tascheron which fitted the door opening to the fields; this key was found carefully buried two feet below one of the miser's holes, where Monsieur des Vanneaulx, digging deep to make sure there was not another layer of treasure-pots, chanced to find it; the police, after many researches, found the different persons who had furnished Tascheron with the iron, loaned him the vice, and given him the file, with which the key was presumably made.

The key was the first real clue. It put the police on the track of Tascheron, whom they arrested on the frontiers of the department, in a wood where he was awaiting the passage of a diligence. An hour later he would have started for America.

Besides all this, and in spite of the care with which certain footmarks in the ploughed field and on the mud of the road had been effaced and covered up, the searchers had found in several places the imprint of shoes, which they carefully measured and described, and which were afterwards found to correspond with the soles of Tascheron's shoes taken from his lodgings. This fatal proof confirmed the statement of the landlady. The authorities now attributed the crime to some foreign influence, and not to the man's personal intention; they believed he had accomplices, basing this idea on the impossibility of one man carrying away the buried money; for however strong he might be, no man could carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold to any distance. If each pot contained, as it was supposed to have done, about that sum, this would have required four trips to and from the clover-patch. Now, a singular circumstance went far to prove the hour at which the crime was committed. In the terror Jeanne Malassis must have felt on hearing her master's cries, she knocked over, as she rose, the table at her bedside, on which lay her watch, the only present the miser had given her in five years. The mainspring was broken by the shock, and the hands had stopped at two in the morning. By the middle of March (the date of the murder) daylight dawns between five and six o'clock. To whatever distance the gold had been carried, Tascheron could not possibly, under any apparent hypothesis, have transported it alone.

The care with which some of the footsteps were effaced, while others, to which Tascheron's shoes fitted, remained, certainly pointed to some mysterious assistant. Forced into hypotheses, the authorities once more attributed the crime to a desperate passion; not finding any trace of the object of such a passion in the lower classes, they began to look higher. Perhaps some bourgeoise, sure of the discretion of a man who had the face and bearing of a hero, had been drawn into a romance the outcome of which was crime.

This supposition was to some extent justified by the facts of the murder. The old man had been killed by blows with a spade; evidently, therefore, the murder was sudden, unpremeditated, fortuitous. The lovers might have planned the robbery, but not the murder. The lover and the miser, Tascheron

and Pingret, each under the influence of his master passion, must have met by the buried hoards, both drawn thither by the gleaming of gold on the utter darkness of that fatal night.

In order to obtain, if possible, some light on this latter supposition, the authorities arrested and kept in solitary confinement a sister of Jean-Francois, to whom he was much attached, hoping to obtain through her some clue to the mystery of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron took refuge in total denial of any knowledge whatever, which gave rise to a suspicion that she did know something of the causes of the crime, although in fact she knew nothing.

The accused himself showed points of character that were rare amongst the peasantry. He baffled the cleverest police-spies employed against him, without knowing their real character. To the leading minds of the magistracy his guilt seemed caused by the influence of passion, and not by necessity or greed, as in the case of ordinary murderers, who usually pass through stages of crime and punishment before they commit the supreme deed. Active and careful search was made in following up this idea; but the uniform discretion of the prisoner gave no clue whatever to his prosecutors. The plausible theory of his attachment to a woman of the upper classes having once been admitted, Jean-Francois was subjected to the most insidious examination upon it; but his caution triumphed over all the moral tortures the examining judge applied to him. When, making a final effort, that official told him that the person for whom he had committed the crime was discovered and arrested, his face did not change, and he replied ironically: —

"I should very much like to see him."

When the public were informed of these circumstances, many persons adopted the suspicions of the magistrates, which seemed to be confirmed by Tascheron's savage obstinacy in giving no account of himself. Increased interest was felt in a young man who was now a problem. It is easy to see how these elements kept public curiosity on the *qui vive*, and with what eager interest the trial would be followed. But in spite of every effort on the part of the police, the prosecution stopped short on the threshold of hypothesis; it did not venture to go farther into the mystery where all was obscurity and danger. In certain judicial cases half-certainties are not sufficient for the judges to proceed upon. Nevertheless the case was ordered for trial, in hopes that the truth would come to the surface when the case was brought into court, an ordeal under which many criminals contradict themselves.

Monsieur Graslin was one of the jury; so that either through her husband or through Monsieur de Grandville, the public prosecutor, Veronique knew all the details of the criminal trial which, for a fortnight, kept the department, and we may say all France, in a state of excitement. The attitude maintained by the accused seemed to justify the theory of the prosecution. More than once when the court opened, his eyes turned upon the brilliant assemblage of women who came to find emotions in a real drama, as though he sought for some one. Each time that the man's glance, clear, but impenetrable, swept along those elegant ranks, a movement was perceptible, a sort of shock, as though each woman feared she might appear his accomplice under the inquisitorial eyes of judge and prosecutor.

The hitherto useless efforts of the prosecution were now made public, also the precautions taken by the criminal to ensure the success of his crime. It was shown that Jean-Francois Tascheron had obtained a passport for North America some months before the crime was committed. Thus the plan of leaving France was fully formed; the object of his passion must therefore be a married woman; for he would have no reason to flee the country with a young girl. Possibly the crime had this one object in view, namely, to obtain sufficient means to support this unknown woman in comfort.

The prosecution had found no passport issued to a woman for North America. In case she had obtained one in Paris, the registers of that city were searched, also those of the towns contingent to Limoges, but without result. All the shrewdest minds in the community followed the case with deep attention. While the more virtuous dames of the department attributed the wearing of pumps on a muddy road (an inexplicable circumstance in the ordinary lives of such shoes) to the necessity of

noiselessly watching old Pingret, the men pointed out that pumps were very useful in silently passing through a house – up stairways and along corridors – without discovery.

So Jean-Francois Tascheron and his mistress (by this time she was young, beautiful, romantic, for every one made a portrait of her) had evidently intended to escape with only one passport, to which they would forge the additional words, "and wife." The card tables were deserted at night in the various social salons, and malicious tongues discussed what women were known in March, 1829, to have gone to Paris, and what others could be making, openly or secretly, preparations for a journey. Limoges might be said to be enjoying its Fualdes trial, with an unknown and mysterious Madame Manson for an additional excitement. Never was any provincial town so stirred to its depths as Limoges after each day's session. Nothing was talked of but the trial, all the incidents of which increased the interest felt for the accused, whose able answers, learnedly taken up, turned and twisted and commented upon, gave rise to ample discussions. When one of the jurors asked Tascheron why he had taken a passport for America, the man replied that he had intended to establish a porcelain manufactory in that country. Thus, without committing himself to any line of defence, he covered his accomplice, leaving it to be supposed that the crime was committed, if at all, to obtain funds for this business venture.

In the midst of such excitement it was impossible for Veronique's friends to refrain from discussing in her presence the progress of the case and the reticence of the criminal. Her health was extremely feeble; but the doctor having advised her going out into the fresh air, she had on one occasion taken her mother's arm and walked as far as Madame Sauviat's house in the country, where she rested. On her return she endeavored to keep about until her husband came to his dinner, which she always served him herself. On this occasion Graslin, being detained in the court-room, did not come in till eight o'clock. She went into the dining-room as usual, and was present at a discussion which took place among a number of her friends who had assembled there.

"If my poor father were still living," she remarked to them, "we should know more about the matter; possibly this man might never have become a criminal. I think you have all taken a singular idea about the matter. You insist that love is at the bottom of the crime, and I agree with you there; but why do you think this unknown person is a married woman? He may have loved some young girl whose father and mother would not let her marry him."

"A young girl could, sooner or later, have married him legitimately," replied Monsieur de Grandville. "Tascheron has no lack of patience; he had time to make sufficient means to support her while awaiting the time when all girls are at liberty to marry against the wishes of their parents; he need not have committed a crime to obtain her."

"I did not know that a girl could marry in that way," said Madame Graslin; "but how is it that in a town like this, where all things are known, and where everybody sees everything that happens to his neighbor, not the slightest clue to this woman has been obtained? In order to love, persons must see each other and consequently be seen. What do you really think, you magistrates?" she added, plunging a fixed look into the eyes of the *procureur-general*.

"We think that the woman belongs to the bourgeois or the commercial class."

"I don't agree with you," said Madame Graslin. "A woman of that class does not have elevated sentiments."

This reply drew all eyes on Veronique, and the whole company waited for an explanation of so paradoxical a speech.

"During the hours I lie awake at night I have not been able to keep my mind from dwelling on this mysterious affair," she said slowly, "and I think I have fathomed Tascheron's motive. I believe the person he loves is a young girl, because a married woman has interests, if not feelings, which partly fill her heart and prevent her from yielding so completely to a great passion as to leave her home. There is such a thing as a love proceeding from passion which is half maternal, and to me it is evident that this man was loved by a woman who wished to be his prop, his Providence. She

must have put into her passion something of the genius that inspires the work of artists and poets, the creative force which exists in woman under another form; for it is her mission to create men, not things. Our works are our children; our children are the pictures, books, and statues of our lives. Are we not artists in their earliest education? I say that this unknown woman, if she is not a young girl, has never been a mother but is filled with the maternal instinct; she has loved this man to form him, to develop him. It needs a feminine element in you men of law to detect these shades of motive, which too often escape you. If I had been your deputy," she said, looking straight at the *procureur-general*, "I should have found the guilty woman, if indeed there is any guilt about it. I agree with the Abbe Dutheil that these lovers meant to fly to America with the money of old Pingret. The theft led to the murder by the fatal logic which the punishment of death inspires. And so," she added with an appealing look at Monsieur de Grandville, "I think it would be merciful in you to abandon the theory of premeditation, for in so doing you would save the man's life. He is evidently a fine man in spite of his crime; he might, perhaps, repair that crime by a great repentance if you gave him time. The works of repentance ought to count for something in the judgment of the law. In these days is there nothing better for a human being to do than to give his life, or build, as in former times, a cathedral of Milan, to expiate his crimes?"

"Your ideas are noble, madame," said Monsieur de Grandville, "but, premeditation apart, Tascheron would still be liable to the penalty of death on account of the other serious and proved circumstances attending the crime, – such as forcible entrance and burglary at night."

"Then you think that he will certainly be found guilty?" she said, lowering her eyelids.

"I am certain of it," he said; "the prosecution has a strong case."

A slight tremor rustled Madame Graslin's dress.

"I feel cold," she said. Taking her mother's arm she went to bed.

"She seemed quite herself this evening," said her friends.

The next day Veronique was much worse and kept her bed. When her physician expressed surprise at her condition she said, smiling: —

"I told you that that walk would do me no good."

Ever since the opening of the trial Tascheron's demeanor had been equally devoid of hypocrisy or bravado. Veronique's physician, intending to divert his patient's mind, tried to explain this demeanor, which the man's defenders were making the most of. The prisoner was misled, said the doctor, by the talents of his lawyer, and was sure of acquittal; at times his face expressed a hope that was greater than that of merely escaping death. The antecedents of the man (who was only twenty-three years old) were so at variance with the crime now charged to him that his legal defenders claimed his present bearing to be a proof of innocence; besides, the overwhelming circumstantial proofs of the theory of the prosecution were made to appear so weak by his advocate that the man was buoyed up by the lawyer's arguments. To save his client's life the lawyer made the most of the evident want of premeditation; hypothetically he admitted the premeditation of the robbery but not of the murders, which were evidently (no matter who was the guilty party) the result of two unexpected struggles. Success, the doctor said, was really as doubtful for one side as for the other.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.