HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE LESSER BOURGEOISIE

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The Lesser Bourgeoisie:

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DEDICATION

To Constance-Victoire

Here, madame, is one of those books which come into the mind, whence no one knows, giving pleasure to the author before he can foresee what reception the public, our great present judge, will accord to it. Feeling almost certain of your sympathy in my pleasure, I dedicate the book to you. Ought it not to belong to you as the tithe formerly belonged to the Church in memory of God, who makes all things bud and fruit in the fields and in the intellect?

A few lumps of clay, left by Moliere at the feet of his colossal statue of Tartuffe, have here been kneaded by a hand more daring than able; but, at whatever distance I may be from the greatest of comic writers, I shall still be glad to have used these crumbs in showing the modern Hypocrite in action. The chief encouragement that I have had in this difficult undertaking was in finding it apart from all religious questions, – questions which ought to be kept out of it for the sake of one so pious as yourself; and also

because of what a great writer has lately called our present "indifference in matters of religion."

May the double signification of your names be for my book a prophecy! Deign to find here the respectful gratitude of him who ventures to call himself the most devoted of your servants.

De Balzac.

PART I. THE LESSER BOURGEOIS OF PARIS

CHAPTER I. DEPARTING PARIS

The tourniquet Saint-Jean, the narrow passage entered through a turnstile, a description of which was said to be so wearisome in the study entitled "A Double Life" (Scenes from Private Life), that naive relic of old Paris, has at the present moment no existence except in our said typography. The building of the Hotel-de-Ville, such as we now see it, swept away a whole section of the city.

In 1830, passers along the street could still see the turnstile painted on the sign of a wine-merchant, but even that house, its last asylum, has been demolished. Alas! old Paris is disappearing with frightful rapidity. Here and there, in the course of this history of Parisian life, will be found preserved, sometimes the type of the dwellings of the middle ages, like that described in "Fame and Sorrow" (Scenes from Private Life), one or two specimens of which exist to the present day; sometimes a house like that of Judge Popinot, rue du Fouarre, a specimen of the former bourgeoisie; here, the remains of Fulbert's house; there, the old dock of the Seine as it was under Charles IX. Why

should not the historian of French society, a new Old Mortality, endeavor to save these curious expressions of the past, as Walter Scott's old man rubbed up the tombstones? Certainly, for the last ten years the outcries of literature in this direction have not been superfluous; art is beginning to disguise beneath its floriated ornaments those ignoble facades of what are called in Paris "houses of product," which one of our poets has jocosely compared to chests of drawers.

Let us remark here, that the creation of the municipal commission "del ornamento" which superintends at Milan the architecture of street facades, and to which every house owner is compelled to subject his plan, dates from the seventeenth century. Consequently, we see in that charming capital the effects of this public spirit on the part of nobles and burghers, while we admire their buildings so full of character and originality. Hideous, unrestrained speculation which, year after year, changes the uniform level of storeys, compresses a whole apartment into the space of what used to be a salon, and wages war upon gardens, will infallibly react on Parisian manners and morals. We shall soon be forced to live more without than within. Our sacred private life, the freedom and liberty of home, where will they be? – reserved for those who can muster fifty thousand francs a year! In fact, few millionaires now allow themselves the luxury of a house to themselves, guarded by a courtyard on a street and protected from public curiosity by a shady garden at the back.

By levelling fortunes, that section of the Code which regulates testamentary bequests, has produced these huge stone phalansteries, in which thirty families are often lodged, returning a rental of a hundred thousand francs a year. Fifty years hence we shall be able to count on our fingers the few remaining houses which resemble that occupied, at the moment our narrative begins, by the Thuillier family, – a really curious house which deserves the honor of an exact description, if only to compare the life of the bourgeoisie of former times with that of to-day.

The situation and the aspect of this house, the frame of our present Scene of manners and morals, has, moreover, a flavor, a perfume of the lesser bourgeoisie, which may attract or repel attention according to the taste of each reader.

In the first place, the Thuillier house did not belong to either Monsieur or Madame Thuillier, but to Mademoiselle Thuillier, the sister of Monsieur Thuillier.

This house, bought during the first six months which followed the revolution of July by Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne-Brigitte Thuillier, a spinster of full age, stands about the middle of the rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer, to the right as you enter by the rue d'Enfer, so that the main building occupied by Monsieur Thuillier faces south.

The progressive movement which is carrying the Parisian population to the heights along the right bank of the Seine had long injured the sale of property in what is called the "Latin quarter," when reasons, which will be given when we

come to treat of the character and habits of Monsieur Thuillier, determined his sister to the purchase of real estate. She obtained this property for the small sum of forty-six thousand francs; certain extras amounted to six thousand more; in all, the price paid was fifty-two thousand francs. A description of the property given in the style of an advertisement, and the results obtained by Monsieur Thuillier's exertions, will explain by what means so many fortunes increased enormously after July, 1830, while so many others sank.

Toward the street the house presents a facade of rough stone covered with plaster, cracked by weather and lined by the mason's instrument into a semblance of blocks of cut stone. This frontage is so common in Paris and so ugly that the city ought to offer premiums to house-owners who would build their facades of cut-stone blocks. Seven windows lighted the gray front of this house which was raised three storeys, ending in a mansard roof covered with slate. The porte-cochere, heavy and solid, showed by its workmanship and style that the front building on the street had been erected in the days of the Empire, to utilize a part of the courtyard of the vast old mansion, built at an epoch when the quarter d'Enfer enjoyed a certain vogue.

On one side was the porter's lodge; on the other the staircase of the front building. Two wings, built against the adjoining houses, had formerly served as stables, coach-house, kitchen and offices to the rear dwelling; but since 1830, they had been converted into warerooms. The one on the right was let to a

certain M. Metivier, jr., wholesale dealer in paper; that on the left to a bookseller named Barbet. The offices of each were above the warerooms; the bookseller occupying the first storey, and the paper-dealer the second storey of the house on the street. Metivier, jr., who was more of a commission merchant in paper than a regular dealer, and Barbet, much more of a money lender and discounter than a bookseller, kept these vast warerooms for the purpose of storing, – one, his stacks of paper, bought of needy manufacturers, the other, editions of books given as security for loans.

The shark of bookselling and the pike of paper-dealing lived on the best of terms, and their mutual operations, exempt from the turmoil of retail business, brought so few carriages into that tranquil courtyard that the concierge was obliged to pull up the grass between the paving stones. Messrs. Barbet and Metivier paid a few rare visits to their landlords, and the punctuality with which they paid their rent classed them as good tenants; in fact, they were looked upon as very honest men by the Thuillier circle.

As for the third floor on the street, it was made into two apartments; one of which was occupied by M. Dutocq, clerk of the justice of peace, a retired government employee, and a frequenter of the Thuillier salon; the other by the hero of this Scene, about whom we must content ourselves at the present moment by fixing the amount of his rent, – namely, seven hundred francs a year, – and the location he had chosen in the heart of this well-filled building, exactly three years before the

curtain rises on the present domestic drama.

The clerk, a bachelor of fifty, occupied the larger of the two apartments on the third floor. He kept a cook, and the rent of the rooms was a thousand francs a year. Within two years of the time of her purchase, Mademoiselle Thuillier was receiving seven thousand two hundred francs in rentals, for a house which the late proprietor had supplied with outside blinds, renovated within, and adorned with mirrors, without being able to sell or let it. Moreover, the Thuilliers themselves, nobly lodged, as we shall see, enjoyed also a fine garden, – one of the finest in that quarter, – the trees of which shaded the lonely little street named the rue Neuve-Saint-Catherine.

Standing between the courtyard and the garden, the main building, which they inhabited, seems to have been the caprice of some enriched bourgeois in the reign of Louis XIV.; the dwelling, perhaps, of a president of the parliament, or that of a tranquil savant. Its noble free-stone blocks, damaged by time, have a certain air of Louis-the-Fourteenth grandeur; the courses of the facade define the storeys; panels of red brick recall the appearance of the stables at Versailles; the windows have masks carved as ornaments in the centre of their arches and below their sills. The door, of small panels in the upper half and plain below, through which, when open, the garden can be seen, is of that honest, unassuming style which was often employed in former days for the porter's lodges of the royal chateaux.

This building, with five windows to each course, rises two

storeys above the ground-floor, and is particularly noticeable for a roof of four sides ending in a weather-vane, and broken here and there by tall, handsome chimneys, and oval windows. Perhaps this structure is the remains of some great mansion; but after examining all the existing old maps of Paris, we find nothing which bears out this conjecture. Moreover, the title-deeds of property under Louis XIV. was Petitot, the celebrated painter in miniature, who obtained it originally from President Lecamus. We may therefore believe that Lecamus lived in this building while he was erecting his more famous mansion in the rue de Thorigny.

So Art and the legal robe have passed this way in turn. How many instigations of needs and pleasures have led to the interior arrangement of the dwelling! To right, as we enter a square hall forming a closed vestibule, rises a stone staircase with two windows looking on the garden. Beneath the staircase opens a door to the cellar. From this vestibule we enter the dining-room, lighted from the courtyard, and the dining-room communicates at its side with the kitchen, which forms a continuation of the wing in which are the warerooms of Metivier and Barbet. Behind the staircase extends, on the garden side, a fine study or office with two large windows. The first and second floor form two complete apartments, and the servants' quarters are shown by the oval windows in the four-sided roof.

A large porcelain stove heats the square vestibule, the two glass doors of which, placed opposite to each other, light it. This

room, paved in black and white marble, is especially noticeable for a ceiling of beams formerly painted and gilt, but which had since received, probably under the Empire, a coat of plain white paint. The three doors of the study, salon and dining-room, surmounted by oval panels, are awaiting a restoration that is more than needed. The wood-work is heavy, but the ornamentation is not without merit. The salon, panelled throughout, recalls the great century by its tall mantelpiece of Languedoc marble, its ceiling decorated at the corners, and by the style of its windows, which still retain their little panes. The dining-room, communicating with the salon by a double door, is floored with stone; the wood-work is oak, unpainted, and an atrocious modern wall-paper has been substituted for the tapestries of the olden time. The ceiling is of chestnut; and the study, modernized by Thuillier, adds its quota to these discordances.

The white and gold mouldings of the salon are so effaced that nothing remains of the gilding but reddish lines, while the white enamelling is yellow, cracked, and peeling off. Never did the Latin saying "Otium cum dignitate" have a greater commentary to the mind of a poet than in this noble building. The iron-work of the staircase baluster is worthy of the artist and the magistrate; but to find other traces of their taste to-day in this majestic relic, the eyes of an artistic observer are needed.

The Thuilliers and their predecessors have frequently degraded this jewel of the upper bourgeoisie by the habits and inventions of the lesser bourgeoisie. Look at those walnut

chairs covered with horse-hair, that mahogany table with its oilcloth cover, that sideboard, also of mahogany, that carpet, bought at a bargain, beneath the table, those metal lamps, that wretched paper with its red border, those execrable engravings, and the calico curtains with red fringes, in a dining-room, where the friends of Petitot once feasted! Do you notice the effect produced in the salon by those portraits of Monsieur and Madame and Mademoiselle Thuillier by Pierre Grassou, the artist par excellence of the modern bourgeoisie. Have you remarked the card-tables and the consoles of the Empire, the tea-table supported by a lyre, and that species of sofa, of gnarled mahogany, covered in painted velvet of a chocolate tone? On the chimney-piece, with the clock (representing the Bellona of the Empire), are candelabra with fluted columns. Curtains of woollen damask, with under-curtains of embroidered muslin held back by stamped brass holders, drape the windows. On the floor a cheap carpet. The handsome vestibule has wooden benches, covered with velvet, and the panelled walls with their fine carvings are mostly hidden by wardrobes, brought there from time to time from the bedrooms occupied by the Thuilliers. Fear, that hideous divinity, has caused the family to add sheet-iron doors on the garden side and on the courtyard side, which are folded back against the walls in the daytime, and are closed at night.

It is easy to explain the deplorable profanation practised on this monument of the private life of the bourgeoisie of the

seventeenth century, by the private life of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth. At the beginning of the Consulate, let us say, some master-mason having bought the ancient building, took the idea of turning to account the ground which lay between it and the street. He probably pulled down the fine porte-cochere or entrance gate, flanked by little lodges which guarded the charming "sejour" (to use a word of the olden time), and proceeded, with the industry of a Parisian proprietor, to impress his withering mark on the elegance of the old building. What a curious study might be made of the successive title-deeds of property in Paris! A private lunatic asylum performs its functions in the rue des Batailles in the former dwelling of the Chevalier Pierre Bayard du Terrail, once without fear and without reproach; a street has now been built by the present bourgeois administration through the site of the hotel Necker. Old Paris is departing, following its kings who abandoned it. For one masterpiece of architecture saved from destruction by a Polish princess (the hotel Lambert, Ile Saint-Louis, bought and occupied by the Princess Czartoriska) how many little palaces have fallen, like this dwelling of Petitot, into the hands of such as Thuillier.

Here follows the causes which made Mademoiselle Thuillier the owner of the house.

CHAPTER II. THE HISTORY OF A TYRANNY

At the fall of the Villele ministry, Monsieur Louis-Jerome Thuillier, who had then seen twenty-six years' service as a clerk in the ministry of finance, became sub-director of a department thereof; but scarcely had he enjoyed the subaltern authority of a position formerly his lowest hope, when the events of July, 1830, forced him to resign it. He calculated, shrewdly enough, that his pension would be honorably and readily given by the new-comers, glad to have another office at their disposal. He was right; for a pension of seventeen hundred francs was paid to him immediately.

When the prudent sub-director first talked of resigning, his sister, who was far more the companion of his life than his wife, trembled for his future.

"What will become of Thuillier?" was a question which Madame and Mademoiselle Thuillier put to each other with mutual terror in their little lodging on a third floor of the rue d'Argenteuil.

"Securing his pension will occupy him for a time," Mademoiselle Thuillier said one day; "but I am thinking of investing my savings in a way that will cut out work for him. Yes; it will be something like administrating the finances to manage a piece of property."

"Oh, sister! you will save his life," cried Madame Thuillier.

"I have always looked for a crisis of this kind in Jerome's life," replied the old maid, with a protecting air.

Mademoiselle Thuillier had too often heard her brother remark: "Such a one is dead; he only survived his retirement two years"; she had too often heard Colleville, her brother's intimate friend, a government employee like himself, say, jesting on this climacteric of bureaucrats, "We shall all come to it, ourselves," not to appreciate the danger her brother was running. The change from activity to leisure is, in truth, the critical period for government employees of all kinds.

Those of them who know not how to substitute, or perhaps cannot substitute other occupations for the work to which they have been accustomed, change in a singular manner; some die outright; others take to fishing, the vacancy of that amusement resembling that of their late employment under government; others, who are smarter men, dabble in stocks, lose their savings, and are thankful to obtain a place in some enterprise that is likely to succeed, after a first disaster and liquidation, in the hands of an abler management. The late clerk then rubs his hands, now empty, and says to himself, "I always did foresee the success of the business." But nearly all these retired bureaucrats have to fight against their former habits.

"Some," Colleville used to say, "are victims to a sort of 'spleen' peculiar to the government clerk; they die of a checked circulation; a red-tapeworm is in their vitals. That little Poiret

couldn't see the well-known white carton without changing color at the beloved sight; he used to turn from green to yellow."

Mademoiselle Thuillier was considered the moving spirit of her brother's household; she was not without decision and force of character, as the following history will show. This superiority over those who immediately surrounded her enabled her to judge her brother, although she adored him. After witnessing the failure of the hopes she had set upon her idol, she had too much real maternity in her feeling for him to let herself be mistaken as to his social value.

Thuillier and his sister were children of the head porter at the ministry of finance. Jerome had escaped, thanks to his near-sightedness, all drafts and conscriptions. The father's ambition was to make his son a government clerk. At the beginning of this century the army presented too many posts not to leave various vacancies in the government offices. A deficiency of minor officials enabled old Pere Thuillier to hoist his son upon the lowest step of the bureaucratic hierarchy. The old man died in 1814, leaving Jerome on the point of becoming sub-director, but with no other fortune than that prospect. The worthy Thuillier and his wife (who died in 1810) had retired from active service in 1806, with a pension as their only means of support; having spent what property they had in giving Jerome the education required in these days, and in supporting both him and his sister.

The influence of the Restoration on the bureaucracy is well known. From the forty and one suppressed departments a crowd

of honorable employees returned to Paris with nothing to do, and clamorous for places inferior to those they had lately occupied. To these acquired rights were added those of exiled families ruined by the Revolution. Pressed between the two floods, Jerome thought himself lucky not to have been dismissed under some frivolous pretext. He trembled until the day when, becoming by mere chance sub-director, he saw himself secure of a retiring pension. This cursory view of matters will serve to explain Monsieur Thuillier's very limited scope and knowledge. He had learned the Latin, mathematics, history, and geography that are taught in schools, but he never got beyond what is called the second class; his father having preferred to take advantage of a sudden opportunity to place him at the ministry. So, while the young Thuillier was making his first records on the Grand-Livre, he ought to have been studying his rhetoric and philosophy.

While grinding the ministerial machine, he had no leisure to cultivate letters, still less the arts; but he acquired a routine knowledge of his business, and when he had an opportunity to rise, under the Empire, to the sphere of superior employees, he assumed a superficial air of competence which concealed the son of a porter, though none of it rubbed into his mind. His ignorance, however, taught him to keep silence, and silence served him well. He accustomed himself to practise, under the imperial regime, a passive obedience which pleased his superiors; and it was to this quality that he owed at a later period his promotion to the rank of sub-director. His routine

habits then became great experience; his manners and his silence concealed his lack of education, and his absolute nullity was a recommendation, for a cipher was needed. The government was afraid of displeasing both parties in the Chamber by selecting a man from either side; it therefore got out of the difficulty by resorting to the rule of seniority. That is how Thuillier became sub-director. Mademoiselle Thuillier, knowing that her brother abhorred reading, and could substitute no business for the bustle of a public office, had wisely resolved to plunge him into the cares of property, into the culture of a garden, in short, into all the infinitely petty concerns and neighborhood intrigues which make up the life of the bourgeoisie.

The transplanting of the Thuillier household from the rue d'Argenteuil to the rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer, the business of making the purchase, of finding a suitable porter, and then of obtaining tenants occupied Thuillier from 1831 to 1832. When the phenomenon of the change was accomplished, and the sister saw that Jerome had borne it fairly well, she found him other cares and occupations (about which we shall hear later), all based upon the character of the man himself, as to which it will now be useful to give information.

Though the son of a ministerial porter, Thuillier was what is called a fine man, slender in figure, above middle height, and possessing a face that was rather agreeable if wearing his spectacles, but frightful without them; which is frequently the case with near-sighted persons; for the habit of looking through

glasses has covered the pupils of his eyes with a sort of film.

Between the ages of eighteen and thirty, young Thuillier had much success among women, in a sphere which began with the lesser bourgeois and ended in that of the heads of departments. Under the Empire, war left Parisian society rather denuded of men of energy, who were mostly on the battlefield; and perhaps, as a great physician has suggested, this may account for the flabbiness of the generation which occupies the middle of the nineteenth century.

Thuillier, forced to make himself noticeable by other charms than those of mind, learned to dance and to waltz in a way to be cited; he was called "that handsome Thuillier"; he played billiards to perfection; he knew how to cut out likenesses in black paper, and his friend Colleville coached him so well that he was able to sing all the ballads of the day. These various small accomplishments resulted in that appearance of success which deceives youth and befogs it about the future. Mademoiselle Thuillier, from 1806 to 1814, believed in her brother as Mademoiselle d'Orleans believed in Louis-Philippe. She was proud of Jerome; she expected to see him the director-general of his department of the ministry, thanks to his successes in certain salons, where, undoubtedly, he would never have been admitted but for the circumstances which made society under the Empire a medley.

But the successes of "that handsome Thuillier" were usually of short duration; women did not care to keep his devotion any

more than he desired to make his devotion eternal. He was really an unwilling Don Juan; the career of a "beau" wearied him to the point of aging him; his face, covered with lines like that of an old coquette, looked a dozen years older than the registers made him. There remained to him of all his successes in gallantry, a habit of looking at himself in mirrors, of buttoning his coat to define his waist, and of posing in various dancing attitudes; all of which prolonged, beyond the period of enjoying his advantages, the sort of lease that he held on his cognomen, "that handsome Thuillier."

The truth of 1806 has, however, become a fable, in 1826. He retains a few vestiges of the former costume of the beaux of the Empire, which are not unbecoming to the dignity of a former sub-director. He still wears the white cravat with innumerable folds, wherein his chin is buried, and the coquettish bow, formerly tied by the hands of beauty, the two ends of which threaten danger to the passers to right and left. He follows the fashions of former days, adapting them to his present needs; he tips his hat on the back of his head, and wears shoes and thread stockings in summer; his long-tailed coats remind one of the well-known "surtouts" of the Empire; he has not yet abandoned his frilled shirts and his white waistcoats; he still plays with his Empire switch, and holds himself so erect that his back bends in. No one, seeing Thuillier promenading on the boulevards, would take him for the son of a man who cooked the breakfasts of the clerks at a ministry and wore the livery of Louis XVI.;

he resembles an imperial diplomatist or a sub-prefect. Now, not only did Mademoiselle Thuillier very innocently work upon her brother's weak spot by encouraging in him an excessive care of his person, which, in her, was simply a continuation of her worship, but she also provided him with family joys, by transplanting to their midst a household which had hitherto been quasi-collateral to them.

It was that of Monsieur Colleville, an intimate friend of Thuillier. But before we proceed to describe Pylades let us finish with Orestes, and explain why Thuillier – that handsome Thuillier – was left without a family of his own – for the family, be it said, is non-existent without children. Herein appears one of those deep mysteries which lie buried in the arena of private life, a few shreds of which rise to the surface at moments when the pain of a concealed situation grows poignant. This concerns the life of Madame and Mademoiselle Thuillier; so far, we have seen only the life (and we may call it the public life) of Jerome Thuillier.

Marie-Jeanne-Brigitte Thuillier, four years older than her brother, had been utterly sacrificed to him; it was easier to give a career to one than a "dot" to the other. Misfortune to some natures is a pharos, which illumines to their eyes the dark low corners of social existence. Superior to her brother both in mind and energy, Brigitte had one of those natures which, under the hammer of persecution, gather themselves together, become compact and powerfully resistant, not to say inflexible.

Jealous of her independence, she kept aloof from the life of the household; choosing to make herself the sole arbiter of her own fate. At fourteen years of age, she went to live alone in a garret, not far from the ministry of finance, which was then in the rue Vivienne, and also not far from the Bank of France, then, and now, in the rue de la Vrilliere. There she bravely gave herself up to a form of industry little known and the perquisite of a few persons, which she obtained, thanks to the patrons of her father. It consisted in making bags to hold coin for the Bank, the Treasury, and the great financial houses. At the end of three years she employed two workwomen. By investing her savings on the Grand-Livre, she found herself, in 1814, the mistress of three thousand six hundred francs a year, earned in fifteen years. As she spent little, and dined with her father as long as he lived, and, as government securities were very low during the last convulsions of the Empire, this result, which seems at first sight exaggerated, explains itself.

On the death of their father, Brigitte and Jerome, the former being twenty-seven, the latter twenty-three, united their existence. Brother and sister were bound together by an extreme affection. If Jerome, then at the height of his success, was pinched for money, his sister, clothed in serge, and her fingers roughened by the coarse thread with which she sewed her bags, would give him a few louis. In Brigitte's eyes Jerome was the handsomest and most charming man in the whole French Empire. To keep house for this cherished brother, to be initiated

into the secrets of Lindor and Don Juan, to be his handmaiden, his spaniel, was Brigitte's dream. She immolated herself lovingly to an idol whose selfishness, always great, was enormously increased by her self-sacrifice. She sold her business to her forewoman for fifteen thousand francs and came to live with Thuillier in the rue d'Argenteuil, where she made herself the mother, protectress, and servant of this spoiled child of women. Brigitte, with the natural caution of a girl who owed everything to her own discretion and her own labor, concealed the amount of her savings from Jerome, – fearing, no doubt, the extravagance of a man of gallantry. She merely paid a quota of six hundred francs a year to the expenses of the household, and this, with her brother's eighteen hundred, enabled her to make both ends meet at the end of the year.

From the first days of their coming together, Thuillier listened to his sister as to an oracle; he consulted her in his trifling affairs, kept none of his secrets from her, and thus made her taste the fruit of despotism which was, in truth, the one little sin of her nature. But the sister had sacrificed everything to the brother; she had staked her all upon his heart; she lived by him only. Brigitte's ascendancy over Jerome was singularly proved by the marriage which she procured for him about the year 1814.

Seeing the tendency to enforced reduction which the newcomers to power under the Restoration were beginning to bring about in the government offices, and particularly since the return of the old society which sought to ride over the bourgeoisie,

Brigitte understood, far better than her brother could explain it to her, the social crisis which presently extinguished their common hopes. No more successes for that handsome Thuillier in the salons of the nobles who now succeeded the plebeians of the Empire!

Thuillier was not enough of a person to take up a politic opinion and choose a party; he felt, as his sister did for him, the necessity of profiting by the remains of his youth to make a settlement. In such a situation, a sister as jealous of her power as Brigitte naturally would, and ought, to marry her brother, to suit herself as well as to suit him; for she alone could make him really happy, Madame Thuillier being only an indispensable accessory to the obtaining of two or three children. If Brigitte did not have an intellect quite the equal of her will, at least she had the instinct of her despotism; without, it is true, education, she marched straight before her, with the headstrong determination of a nature accustomed to succeed. She had the genius of housekeeping, a faculty for economy, a thorough understanding of how to live, and a love for work. She saw plainly that she could never succeed in marrying Jerome into a sphere above their own, where parents might inquire into their domestic life and feel uneasy at finding a mistress already reigning in the home. She therefore sought in a lower grade for persons to dazzle, and found, almost beside her, a suitable match.

The oldest usher at the Bank, a man named Lemprun, had an only daughter, called Celeste. Mademoiselle Celeste Lemprun

would inherit the fortune of her mother, the only daughter of a rich farmer. This fortune consisted of some acres of land in the environs of Paris, which the old father still worked; besides this, she would have the property of Lemprun himself, a man who had left the firms of Thelusson and of Keller to enter the service of the Bank of France. Lemprun, now the head of that service, enjoyed the respect and consideration of the governors and auditors.

The Bank council, on hearing of the probable marriage of Celeste to an honorable employee at the ministry of finance, promised a wedding present of six thousand francs. This gift, added to twelve thousand given by Pere Lemprun, and twelve thousand more from the maternal grandfather, Sieur Galard, market-gardener at Auteuil, brought up the dowry to thirty thousand francs. Old Galard and Monsieur and Madame Lemprun were delighted with the marriage. Lemprun himself knew Mademoiselle Thuillier, and considered her one of the worthiest and most conscientious women in Paris. Brigitte then, for the first time, allowed her investments on the Grand-Livre to shine forth, assuring Lemprun that she should never marry; consequently, neither he nor his wife, persons devoted to the main chance, would ever allow themselves to find fault with Brigitte. Above all, they were greatly struck by the splendid prospects of the handsome Thuillier, and the marriage took place, as the conventional saying is, to the general satisfaction.

The governor of the Bank and the secretary were the bride's

witnesses; Monsieur de la Billardiere, director of Thuillier's department, and Monsieur Rabourdin, head of the office, being those of the groom. Six days after the marriage old Lemprun was the victim of a daring robbery which made a great noise in the newspapers of the day, though it was quickly forgotten during the events of 1815. The guilty parties having escaped detection, Lemprun wished to make up the loss; but the Bank agreed to carry the deficit to its profit and loss account; nevertheless, the poor old man actually died of the grief this affair had caused him. He regarded it as an attack upon his aged honor.

Madame Lemprun then resigned all her property to her daughter, Madame Thuillier, and went to live with her father at Auteuil until he died from an accident in 1817. Alarmed at the prospect of having to manage or lease the market-garden and the farm of her father, Madame Lemprun entreated Brigitte, whose honesty and capacity astonished her, to wind up old Galard's affairs, and to settle the property in such a way that her daughter should take possession of everything, securing to her mother fifteen hundred francs a year and the house at Auteuil. The landed property of the old farmer was sold in lots, and brought in thirty thousand francs. Lemprun's estate had given as much more, so that Madame Thuillier's fortune, including her "dot," amounted in 1818 to ninety thousand francs. Joining the revenue of this property to that of the brother and sister, the Thuillier household had an income, in 1818, amounting to eleven thousand francs, managed by Brigitte alone on her sole responsibility. It is

necessary to begin by stating this financial position, not only to prevent objections but to rid the drama of difficulties.

Brigitte began, from the first, by allowing her brother five hundred francs a month, and by sailing the household boat at the rate of five thousand francs a year. She granted to her sister-in-law fifty francs a month, explaining to her carefully that she herself was satisfied with forty. To strengthen her despotism by the power of money, Brigitte laid by the surplus of her own funds. She made, so it was said in business offices, usurious loans by means of her brother, who appeared as a money-lender. If, between the years 1813 and 1830, Brigitte had capitalized sixty thousand francs, that sum can be explained by the rise in the Funds, and there is no need to have recourse to accusations more or less well founded, which have nothing to do with our present history.

From the first days of the marriage, Brigitte subdued the unfortunate Madame Thuillier with a touch of the spur and a jerk of the bit, both of which she made her feel severely. A further display of tyranny was useless; the victim resigned herself at once. Celeste, thoroughly understood by Brigitte, a girl without mind or education, accustomed to a sedentary life and a tranquil atmosphere, was extremely gentle by nature; she was pious in the fullest acceptation of the word; she would willingly have expiated by the hardest punishments the involuntary wrong of giving pain to her neighbor. She was utterly ignorant of life; accustomed to be waited on by her mother, who did the whole service of the

house, for Celeste was unable to make much exertion, owing to a lymphatic constitution which the least toil wearied. She was truly a daughter of the people of Paris, where children, seldom handsome, and of no vigor, the product of poverty and toil, of homes without fresh air, without freedom of action, without any of the conveniences of life, meet us at every turn.

At the time of the marriage, Celeste was seen to be a little woman, fair and faded almost to sickliness, fat, slow, and silly in the countenance. Her forehead, much too large and too prominent, suggested water on the brain, and beneath that waxen cupola her face, noticeably too small and ending in a point like the nose of a mouse, made some people fear she would become, sooner or later, imbecile. Her eyes, which were light blue, and her lips, always fixed in a smile, did not contradict that idea. On the solemn occasion of her marriage she had the manner, air, and attitude of a person condemned to death, whose only desire is that it might all be over speedily.

"She is rather round," said Colleville to Thuillier.

Brigitte was just the knife to cut into such a nature, to which her own formed the strongest contrast. Mademoiselle Thuillier was remarkable for her regular and correct beauty, but a beauty injured by toil which, from her very childhood, had bent her down to painful, thankless tasks, and by the secret privations she imposed upon herself in order to amass her little property. Her complexion, early discolored, had something the tint of steel. Her brown eyes were framed in brown; on the upper lip was a brown

floss like a sort of smoke. Her lips were thin, and her imperious forehead was surmounted by hair once black, now turning to chinchilla. She held herself as straight as the fairest beauty; but all things else about her showed the hardiness of her life, the deadening of her natural fire, the cost of what she was!

To Brigitte, Celeste was simply a fortune to lay hold of, a future mother to rule, one more subject in her empire. She soon reproached her for being *weak*, a constant word in her vocabulary, and the jealous old maid, who would strongly have resented any signs of activity in her sister-in-law, now took a savage pleasure in prodding the languid inertness of the feeble creature. Celeste, ashamed to see her sister-in-law displaying such energy in household work, endeavored to help her, and fell ill in consequence. Instantly, Brigitte was devoted to her, nursed her like a beloved sister, and would say, in presence of Thuillier: "You haven't any strength, my child; you must never do anything again." She showed up Celeste's incapacity by that display of sympathy with which strength, seeming to pity weakness, finds means to boast of its own powers.

But, as all despotic natures liking to exercise their strength are full of tenderness for physical sufferings, Brigitte took such real care of her sister-in-law as to satisfy Celeste's mother when she came to see her daughter. After Madame Thuillier recovered, however, she called her, in Celeste's hearing, "a helpless creature, good for nothing!" which sent the poor thing crying to her room. When Thuillier found her there, drying her eyes, he excused her

sister, saying: —

"She is an excellent woman, but rather hasty; she loves you in her own way; she behaves just so with me."

Celeste, remembering the maternal care of her sister-in-law during her illness, forgave the wound. Brigitte always treated her brother as the king of the family; she exalted him to Celeste, and made him out an autocrat, a Ladislas, an infallible pope. Madame Thuillier having lost her father and grandfather, and being well-nigh deserted by her mother, who came to see her on Thursdays only (she herself spending Sundays at Auteuil in summer), had no one left to love except her husband, and she did love him, – in the first place, because he was her husband, and secondly, because he still remained to her "that handsome Thuillier." Besides, he sometimes treated her like a wife, and all these reasons together made her adore him. He seemed to her all the more perfect because he often took up her defence and scolded his sister, not from any real interest in his wife, but for pure selfishness, and in order to have peace in the household during the very few moments that he stayed there.

In fact, that handsome Thuillier was never at home except at dinner, after which meal he went out, returning very late at night. He went to balls and other social festivities by himself, precisely as if he were still a bachelor. Thus the two women were always alone together. Celeste insensibly fell into a passive attitude, and became what Brigitte wanted her, – a helot. The Queen Elizabeth of the household then passed from despotism

to a sort of pity for the poor victim who was always sacrificed. She ended by softening her haughty ways, her cutting speech, her contemptuous tones, as soon as she was certain that her sister-in-law was completely under the yoke. When she saw the wounds it made on the neck of her victim, she took care of her as a thing of her own, and Celeste entered upon happier days. Comparing the end with the beginning, she even felt a sort of love for her torturer. To gain some power of self-defence, to become something less a cipher in the household, supported, unknown to herself, by her own means, the poor helot had but a single chance, and that chance never came to her.

Celeste had no child. This barrenness, which, from month to month, brought floods of tears from her eyes, was long the cause of Brigitte's scorn; she reproached the poor woman bitterly for being fit for nothing, not even to bear children. The old maid, who had longed to love her brother's child as if it were her own, was unable, for years, to reconcile herself to this irremediable sterility.

At the time when our history begins, namely, in 1840, Celeste, then forty-six years old, had ceased to weep; she now had the certainty of never being a mother. And here is a strange thing. After twenty-five years of this life, in which victory had ended by first dulling and then breaking its own knife, Brigitte loved Celeste as much as Celeste loved Brigitte. Time, ease, and the perpetual rubbing of domestic life, had worn off the angles and smoothed the asperities; Celeste's resignation and lamb-like

gentleness had brought, at last, a serene and peaceful autumn. The two women were still further united by the one sentiment that lay within them, namely, their adoration for the lucky and selfish Thuillier.

Moreover, these two women, both childless, had each, like all women who have vainly desired children, fallen in love with a child. This fictitious motherhood, equal in strength to a real motherhood, needs an explanation which will carry us to the very heart of our drama, and will show the reason of the new occupation which Mademoiselle Thuillier provided for her brother.

CHAPTER III. COLLEVILLE

Thuillier had entered the ministry of finance as supernumerary at the same time as Colleville, who has been mentioned already as his intimate friend. In opposition to the well-regulated, gloomy household of Thuillier, social nature had provided that of Colleville; and if it is impossible not to remark that this fortuitous contrast was scarcely moral, we must add that, before deciding that point, it would be well to wait for the end of this drama, unfortunately too true, for which the present historian is not responsible.

Colleville was the only son of a talented musician, formerly first violin at the Opera under Francoeur and Rebel, who related, at least six times a month during his lifetime, anecdotes concerning the representations of the "Village Seer"; and mimicked Jean-Jacques Rousseau, taking him off to perfection. Colleville and Thuillier were inseparable friends; they had no secrets from each other, and their friendship, begun at fifteen years of age, had never known a cloud up to the year 1839. The former was one of those employees who are called, in the government offices, pluralists. These clerks are remarkable for their industry. Colleville, a good musician, owed to the name and influence of his father a situation as first clarionet at the Opera-Comique, and so long as he was a bachelor, Colleville, who was rather richer than Thuillier, shared his means with

his friend. But, unlike Thuillier, Colleville married for love a Mademoiselle Flavie, the natural daughter of a celebrated danseuse at the Opera; her reputed father being a certain du Bourguier, one of the richest contractors of the day. In style and origin, Flavie was apparently destined for a melancholy career, when Colleville, often sent to her mother's apartments, fell in love with her and married her. Prince Galathionne, who at that time was "protecting" the danseuse, then approaching the end of her brilliant career, gave Flavie a "dot" of twenty thousand francs, to which her mother added a magnificent trousseau. Other friends and opera-comrades sent jewels and silver-ware, so that the Colleville household was far richer in superfluities than in capital. Flavie, brought up in opulence, began her married life in a charming apartment, furnished by her mother's upholsterer, where the young wife, who was full of taste for art and for artists, and possessed a certain elegance, ruled, a queen.

Madame Colleville was pretty and piquant, clever, gay, and graceful; to express her in one sentence, – a charming creature. Her mother, the danseuse, now forty-three years old, retired from the stage and went to live in the country, – thus depriving her daughter of the resources derived from her wasteful extravagance. Madame Colleville kept a very agreeable but extremely free and easy household. From 1816 to 1826 she had five children. Colleville, a musician in the evening, kept the books of a merchant from seven to nine in the morning, and by ten o'clock he was at his ministry. Thus, by blowing into a bit

of wood by night, and writing double-entry accounts in the early morning, he managed to eke out his earnings to seven or eight thousand francs a year.

Madame Colleville played the part of a "comme il faut" woman; she received on Wednesdays, gave a concert once a month and a dinner every fortnight. She never saw Colleville except at dinner and at night, when he returned about twelve o'clock, at which hour she was frequently not at home herself. She went to the theatres, where boxes were sometimes given to her; and she would send word to Colleville to come and fetch her from such or such a house, where she was supping and dancing. At her own house, guests found excellent cheer, and her society, though rather mixed, was very amusing; she received and welcomed actresses, artists, men of letters, and a few rich men. Madame Colleville's elegance was on a par with that of Tullia, the leading prima-donna, with whom she was intimate; but though the Collevilles encroached on their capital and were often in difficulty by the end of the month, Flavie was never in debt.

Colleville was very happy; he still loved his wife, and he made himself her best friend. Always received by her with affectionate smiles and sympathetic pleasure, he yielded readily to the irresistible grace of her manners. The vehement activity with which he pursued his three avocations was a part of his natural character and temperament. He was a fine stout man, ruddy, jovial, extravagant, and full of ideas. In ten years there

was never a quarrel in his household. Among business men he was looked upon, in common with all artists, as a scatter-brained fellow; and superficial persons thought that the constant hurry of this hard worker was only the restless coming and going of a busybody.

Colleville had the sense to seem stupid; he boasted of his family happiness, and gave himself unheard-of trouble in making anagrams, in order at times to seem absorbed in that passion. The government clerks of his division at the ministry, the office directors, and even the heads of divisions came to his concerts; now and then he quietly bestowed upon them opera tickets, when he needed some extra indulgence on account of his frequent absence. Rehearsals took half the time that he ought to have been at his desk; but the musical knowledge his father had bequeathed to him was sufficiently genuine and well-grounded to excuse him from all but final rehearsals. Thanks to Madame Colleville's intimacies, both the theatre and the ministry lent themselves kindly to the needs of this industrious pluralist, who, moreover, was bringing up, with great care, a youth, warmly recommended to him by his wife, a future great musician, who sometimes took his place in the orchestra with a promise of eventually succeeding him. In fact, about the year 1827 this young man became the first clarionet when Colleville resigned his position.

The usual comment on Flavie was, "That little slip of a coquette, Madame Colleville." The eldest of the Colleville children, born in 1816, was the living image of Colleville

himself. In 1818, Madame Colleville held the cavalry in high estimation, above even art; and she distinguished more particularly a sub-lieutenant in the dragoons of Saint-Chamans, the young and rich Charles de Gondreville, who afterwards died in the Spanish campaign. By that time Flavie had had a second son, whom she henceforth dedicated to a military career. In 1820 she considered banking the nursing mother of trade, the supporter of Nations, and she made the great Keller, that famous banker and orator, her idol. She then had another son, whom she named Francois, resolving to make him a merchant, – feeling sure that Keller's influence would never fail him. About the close of the year 1820, Thuillier, the intimate friend of Monsieur and Madame Colleville, felt the need of pouring his sorrows into the bosom of this excellent woman, and to her he related his conjugal miseries. For six years he had longed to have children, but God did not bless him; although that poor Madame Thuillier had made novenas, and had even gone, uselessly, to Notra-Dame de Liesse! He depicted Celeste in various lights, which brought the words "Poor Thuillier!" from Flavie's lips. She herself was rather sad, having at the moment no dominant opinion. She poured her own griefs into Thuillier's bosom. The great Keller, that hero of the Left, was, in reality, extremely petty; she had learned to know the other side of public fame, the follies of banking, the emptiness of eloquence! The orator only spoke for show; to her he had behaved extremely ill. Thuillier was indignant. "None but stupid fellows know how to love," he said; "take me!" That

handsome Thuillier was henceforth supposed to be paying court to Madame Colleville, and was rated as one of her "attentives," – a word in vogue during the Empire.

"Ha! you are after my wife," said Colleville, laughing. "Take care; she'll leave you in the lurch, like all the rest."

A rather clever speech, by which Colleville saved his marital dignity. From 1820 to 1821, Thuillier, in virtue of his title as friend of the family, helped Colleville, who had formerly helped him; so much so, that in eighteen months he had lent nearly ten thousand francs to the Colleville establishment, with no intention of ever claiming them. In the spring of 1821, Madame Colleville gave birth to a charming little girl, to whom Monsieur and Madame Thuillier were godfather and godmother. The child was baptized Celeste-Louise-Caroline-Brigitte; Mademoiselle Thuillier wishing that her name should be given among others to the little angel. The name of Caroline was a graceful attention paid to Colleville. Old mother Lemprun assumed the care of putting the baby to nurse under her own eyes at Auteuil, where Celeste and her sister-in-law Brigitte, paid it regularly a semi-weekly visit.

As soon as Madame Colleville recovered she said to Thuillier, frankly, in a very serious tone: —

"My dear friend, if we are all to remain good friends, you must be our friend only. Colleville is attached to you; well, that's enough for you in this household."

"Explain to me," said the handsome Thuillier to Tullia after

this remark, "why women are never attached to me. I am not the Apollo Belvidere, but for all that I'm not a Vulcan; I am passably good-looking, I have sense, I am faithful – "

"Do you want me to tell you the truth?" replied Tullia.

"Yes," said Thuillier.

"Well, though we can, sometimes, love a stupid fellow, we never love a silly one."

Those words killed Thuillier; he never got over them; henceforth he was a prey to melancholy and accused all women of caprice.

The secretary-general of the ministry, des Lupeaulx, whose influence Madame Colleville thought greater than it was, and of whom she said, later, "That was one of my mistakes," became for a time the great man of the Colleville salon; but as Flavie found he had no power to promote Colleville into the upper division, she had the good sense to resent des Lupeaulx's attentions to Madame Rabourdin (whom she called a minx), to whose house she had never been invited, and who had twice had the impertinence not to come to the Colleville concerts.

Madame Colleville was deeply affected by the death of young Gondreville; she felt, she said, the finger of God. In 1824 she turned over a new leaf, talked of economy, stopped her receptions, busied herself with her children, determined to become a good mother of a family; no favorite friend was seen at her house. She went to church, reformed her dress, wore gray, and talked Catholicism, mysticism, and so forth. All

this produced, in 1825, another little son, whom she named Theodore. Soon after, in 1826, Colleville was appointed sub-director of the Clergeot division, and later, in 1828, collector of taxes in a Paris arrondissement. He also received the cross of the Legion of honor, to enable him to put his daughter at the royal school of Saint-Denis. The half-scholarship obtained by Keller for the eldest boy, Charles, was transferred to the second in 1830, when Charles entered the school of Saint-Louis on a full scholarship. The third son, taken under the protection of Madame la Dauphine, was provided with a three-quarter scholarship in the Henri IV. school.

In 183 °Colleville, who had the good fortune not to lose a child, was obliged, owing to his well-known attachment to the fallen royal family, to send in his resignation; but he was clever enough to make a bargain for it, – obtaining in exchange a pension of two thousand four hundred francs, based on his period of service, and ten thousand francs indemnity paid by his successor; he also received the rank of officer of the Legion of honor. Nevertheless, he found himself in rather a cramped condition when Mademoiselle Thuillier, in 1832, advised him to come and live near them; pointing out to him the possibility of obtaining some position in the mayor's office, which, in fact, he did obtain a few weeks later, at a salary of three thousand francs. Thus Thuillier and Colleville were destined to end their days together. In 1833 Madame Colleville, then thirty-five years old, settled herself in the rue d'Enfer, at the corner of the rue des

Deux-Eglises with Celeste and little Theodore, the other boys being at their several schools. Colleville was equidistant between the mayor's office and the rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer. Thus the household, after a brilliant, gay, headlong, reformed, and calmed existence, subsided finally into bourgeois obscurity with five thousand four hundred francs a year for its sole dependence.

Celeste was by this time twelve years of age, and she promised to be pretty. She needed masters, and her education ought to cost not less than two thousand francs a year. The mother felt the necessity of keeping her under the eye of her godfather and godmother. She therefore very willingly adopted the proposal of Mademoiselle Thuillier, who, without committing herself to any engagement, allowed Madame Colleville to understand that the fortunes of her brother, his wife, and herself would go, ultimately, to the little Celeste. The child had been left at Auteuil until she was seven years of age, adored by the good old Madame Lemprun, who died in 1829, leaving twenty thousand francs, and a house which was sold for the enormous sum of twenty-eight thousand. The lively little girl had seen very little of her mother, but very much of Mademoiselle and Madame Thuillier when she first returned to the paternal mansion in 1829; but in 1833 she fell under the dominion of Flavie, who was then, as we have said, endeavoring to do her duty, which, like other women instigated by remorse, she exaggerated. Without being an unkind mother, Flavie was very stern with her daughter. She remembered her own bringing-up, and swore within herself to make Celeste a

virtuous woman. She took her to mass, and had her prepared for her first communion by a rector who has since become a bishop. Celeste was all the more readily pious, because her godmother, Madame Thuillier, was a saint, and the child adored her; she felt that the poor neglected woman loved her better than her own mother.

From 1833 to 1840 she received a brilliant education according to the ideas of the bourgeoisie. The best music-masters made her a fair musician; she could paint a water-color properly; she danced extremely well; and she had studied the French language, history, geography, English, Italian, – in short, all that constitutes the education of a well-brought-up young lady. Of medium height, rather plump, unfortunately near-sighted, she was neither plain nor pretty; not without delicacy or even brilliancy of complexion, it is true, but totally devoid of all distinction of manner. She had a great fund of reserved sensibility, and her godfather and godmother, Mademoiselle Thuillier and Colleville, were unanimous on one point, – the great resource of mothers – namely, that Celeste was capable of attachment. One of her beauties was a magnificent head of very fine blond hair; but her hands and feet showed her bourgeois origin.

Celeste endeared herself by precious qualities; she was kind, simple, without gall of any kind; she loved her father and mother, and would willingly sacrifice herself for their sake. Brought up to the deepest admiration for her godfather by Brigitte (who taught

her to say “Aunt Brigitte”), and by Madame Thuillier and her own mother, Celeste imbibed the highest idea of the ex-beau of the Empire. The house in the rue Saint-Dominique d’Enfer produced upon her very much the effect of the Chateau des Tuileries on a courtier of the new dynasty.

Thuillier had not escaped the action of the administrative rolling-pin which thins the mind as it spreads it out. Exhausted by irksome toil, as much as by his life of gallantry, the ex-sub-director had well-nigh lost all his faculties by the time he came to live in the rue Saint-Dominique. But his weary face, on which there still reigned an air of imperial haughtiness, mingled with a certain contentment, the conceit of an upper official, made a deep impression upon Celeste. She alone adored that haggard face. The girl, moreover, felt herself to be the happiness of the Thuillier household.

CHAPTER IV. THE CIRCLE OF MONSIEUR AND MADAME THUILLIER

The Collevilles and their children became, naturally, the nucleus of the circle which Mademoiselle Thuillier had the ambition to group around her brother. A former clerk in the Billardiere division of the ministry, named Phellion, had lived for the last thirty years in their present quarter. He was promptly greeted by Colleville and Thuillier at the first review. Phellion proved to be one of the most respected men in the arrondissement. He had one daughter, now married to a school-teacher in the rue Saint-Hyacinthe, a Monsieur Barniol. Phellion's eldest son was a professor of mathematics in a royal college; he gave lectures and private lessons, being devoted, so his father was wont to say, to pure mathematics. A second son was in the government School of Engineering. Phellion had a pension of nine hundred francs, and he possessed a little property of nine thousand and a few odd hundred francs; the fruit of his economy and that of his wife during thirty years of toil and privation. He was, moreover, the owner of a little house and garden where he lived in the "impasse" des Feuillantines, – in thirty years he had never used the old-fashioned word "cul-de-sac"!

Dutocq, the clerk of the justice of peace, was also a former employee at the ministry of finance. Sacrificed, in former days, to one of those necessities which are always met with in representative government, he had accepted the position of scapegoat, receiving, privately, a round sum of money and the opportunity to buy his present post of clerk in the arrondissement. This man, not very honorable, and known to be a spy in the government offices, was never welcomed as he thought he ought to be by the Thuilliers; but the coldness of his landlords only made him the more persistent in going to see them. He was a bachelor and had various vices; he therefore concealed his life carefully, knowing well how to maintain his position by flattering his superiors. The justice of peace was much attached to Dutocq. This man, base as he was, managed, in the end, to make himself tolerated by the Thuilliers, chiefly by coarse and cringing adulation. He knew the facts of Thuillier's whole life, his relations with Colleville, and, above all, with Madame Colleville. One and all they feared his tongue, and the Thuilliers, without admitting him to any intimacy, endured his visits.

The family which became the flower of the Thuillier salon was that of a former ministerial clerk, once an object of pity in the government offices, who, driven by poverty, left the public service, in 1827, to fling himself into a business enterprise, having, as he thought, an idea. Minard (that was his name) foresaw a fortune in one of those wicked conceptions which reflect such discredit on French commerce, but which, in the

year 1827, had not yet been exposed and blasted by publicity. Minard bought tea and mixed it with tea-leaves already used; also he adulterated the elements of chocolate in a manner which enabled him to sell the chocolate itself very cheaply. This trade in colonial products, begun in the quartier Saint-Marcel, made a merchant of Minard. He started a factory, and through these early connections he was able to reach the sources of raw material. He then did honorably, and on a large scale, a business begun in the first instance dishonorably. He became a distiller, worked upon untold quantities of products, and, by the year 1835, was considered the richest merchant in the region of the Place Maubert. By that time he had bought a handsome house in the rue des Macons-Sorbonne; he had been assistant mayor, and in 1839 became mayor of his arrondissement and judge in the Court of Commerce. He kept a carriage, had a country-place near Lagny; his wife wore diamonds at the court balls, and he prided himself on the rosette of an officer of the Legion of honor in his buttonhole.

Minard and his wife were exceedingly benevolent. Perhaps he wished to return in retail to the poor the sums he had mulcted from the public by the wholesale. Phellion, Colleville, and Thuillier met their old comrade, Minard, at election, and an intimacy followed; all the closer with the Thuilliers and Collevilles because Madame Minard seemed enchanted to make an acquaintance for her daughter in Celeste Colleville. It was at a grand ball given by the Minards that Celeste made her first

appearance in society (being at that time sixteen and a half years old), dressed as her Christian named demanded, which seemed to be prophetic of her coming life. Delighted to be friendly with Mademoiselle Minard, her elder by four years, she persuaded her father and godfather to cultivate the Minard establishment, with its gilded salons and great opulence, where many political celebrities of the "juste milieu" were wont to congregate, such as Monsieur Popinot, who became, after a time, minister of commerce; Cochin, since made Baron Cochin, a former employee at the ministry of finance, who, having a large interest in the drug business, was now the oracle of the Lombard and Bourdonnais quarters, conjointly with Monsieur Anselme Popinot. Minard's eldest son, a lawyer, aiming to succeed those barristers who were turned down from the Palais for political reasons in 1830, was the genius of the household, and his mother, even more than his father, aspired to marry him well. Zelie Minard, formerly a flower-maker, felt an ardent passion for the upper social spheres, and desired to enter them through the marriages of her son and daughter; whereas Minard, wiser than she, and imbued with the vigor of the middle classes, which the revolution of July had infiltrated into the fibres of government, thought only of wealth and fortune.

He frequented the Thuillier salon to gain information as to Celeste's probable inheritance. He knew, like Dutocq and Phellion, the reports occasioned by Thuillier's former intimacy with Flavie, and he saw at a glance the idolatry of the Thuilliers

for their godchild. Dutocq, to gain admittance to Minard's house, fawned upon him grossly. When Minard, the Rothschild of the arrondissement, appeared at the Thuilliers', he compared him cleverly to Napoleon, finding him stout, fat, and blooming, having left him at the ministry thin, pale, and puny.

"You looked, in the division Billardiere," he said, "like Napoleon before the 18th Brumaire, and I behold you now the Napoleon of the Empire."

Notwithstanding which flattery, Minard received Dutocq very coldly and did not invite him to his house; consequently, he made a mortal enemy of the former clerk.

Monsieur and Madame Phellion, worthy as they were, could not keep themselves from making calculations and cherishing hopes; they thought that Celeste would be the very wife for their son the professor; therefore, to have, as it were, a watcher in the Thuillier salon, they introduced their son-in-law, Monsieur Barniol, a man much respected in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and also an old employee at the mayor's office, an intimate friend of theirs, named Laudigeois. Thus the Phellions formed a phalanx of seven persons; the Collevilles were not less numerous; so that on Sundays it often appeared that thirty persons were assembled in the Thuillier salon. Thuillier renewed acquaintance with the Saillards, Baudoyers, and Falleixs, – all persons of respectability in the quarter of the Palais-Royal, whom they often invited to dinner.

Madame Colleville was, as a woman, the most distinguished

member of this society, just as Minard junior and Professor Phellion were superior among the men. All the others, without ideas or education, and issuing from the lower ranks, presented the types and the absurdities of the lesser bourgeoisie. Though all success, especially if won from distant sources, seems to presuppose some genuine merit, Minard was really an inflated balloon. Expressing himself in empty phrases, mistaking sycophancy for politeness, and wordiness for wit, he uttered his commonplaces with a brisk assurance that passed for eloquence. Certain words which said nothing but answered all things, – progress, steam, bitumen, National guard, order, democratic element, spirit of association, legality, movement, resistance, – seemed, as each political phase developed, to have been actually made for Minard, whose talk was a paraphrase on the ideas of his newspaper. Julien Minard, the young lawyer, suffered from his father as much as his father suffered from his wife. Zelie had grown pretentious with wealth, without, at the same time, learning to speak French. She was now very fat, and gave the idea, in her rich surroundings, of a cook married to her master.

Phellion, that type and model of the petty bourgeois, exhibited as many virtues as he did absurdities. Accustomed to subordination during his bureaucratic life, he respected all social superiority. He was therefore silent before Minard. During the critical period of retirement from office, he had held his own admirably, for the following reason. Never until now had that worthy and excellent man been able to indulge his own

tastes. He loved the city of Paris; he was interested in its embellishment, in the laying out of its streets; he was capable of standing for hours to watch the demolition of houses. He might now have been observed, stolidly planted on his legs, his nose in the air, watching for the fall of a stone which some mason was loosening at the top of a wall, and never moving till the stone fell; when it had fallen he went away as happy as an academician at the fall of a romantic drama. Veritable supernumeraries of the social comedy, Phellion, Laudigeois, and their kind, fulfilled the functions of the antique chorus. They wept when weeping was in order, laughed when they should laugh, and sang in parts the public joys and sorrows; they triumphed in their corner with the triumphs of Algiers, of Constantine, of Lisbon, of Sainte-Jean d'Ulloa; they deplored the death of Napoleon and the fatal catastrophes of the Saint-Merri and the rue Transnonnain, grieving over celebrated men who were utterly unknown to them. Phellion alone presents a double side: he divides himself conscientiously between the reasons of the opposition and those of the government. When fighting went on in the streets, Phellion had the courage to declare himself before his neighbors; he went to the Place Saint-Michel, the place where his battalion assembled; he felt for the government and did his duty. Before and during the riot, he supported the dynasty, the product of July; but, as soon as the political trials began, he stood by the accused. This innocent "weather-cockism" prevails in his political opinions; he produces, in reply to all arguments,

the "colossus of the North." England is, to his thinking, as to that of the old "Constitutionnel," a crone with two faces, – Machiavellian Albion, and the model nation: Machiavellian, when the interests of France and of Napoleon are concerned; the model nation when the faults of the government are in question. He admits, with his chosen paper, the democratic element, but refuses in conversation all compact with the republican spirit. The republican spirit to him means 1793, rioting, the Terror, and agrarian law. The democratic element is the development of the lesser bourgeoisie, the reign of Phellions.

The worthy old man is always dignified; dignity serves to explain his life. He has brought up his children with dignity; he has kept himself a father in their eyes; he insists on being honored in his home, just as he himself honors power and his superiors. He has never made debts. As a juryman his conscience obliges him to sweat blood and water in the effort to follow the debates of a trial; he never laughs, not even if the judge, and audience, and all the officials laugh. Eminently useful, he gives his services, his time, everything – except his money. Felix Phellion, his son, the professor, is his idol; he thinks him capable of attaining to the Academy of Sciences. Thuillier, between the audacious nullity of Minard, and the solid silliness of Phellion, was a neutral substance, but connected with both through his dismal experience. He managed to conceal the emptiness of his brain by commonplace talk, just as he covered the yellow skin of his bald pate with thready locks of his gray hair, brought from the

back of his head with infinite art by the comb of his hairdresser.

"In any other career," he was wont to say, speaking of the government employ, "I should have made a very different fortune."

He had seen the *right*, which is possible in theory and impossible in practice, – results proving contrary to premises, – and he related the intrigues and the injustices of the Rabourdin affair.

"After that, one can believe all, and believe nothing," he would say. "Ah! it is a queer thing, government! I'm very glad not to have a son, and never to see him in the career of a place-hunter."

Colleville, ever gay, rotund, and good-humored, a sayer of "quodlibets," a maker of anagrams, always busy, represented the capable and bantering bourgeois, with faculty without success, obstinate toil without result; he was also the embodiment of jovial resignation, mind without object, art with usefulness, for, excellent musician that he was, he never played now except for his daughter.

The Thuillier salon was in some sort a provincial salon, lighted, however, by continual flashes from the Parisian conflagration; its mediocrity and its platitudes followed the current of the times. The popular saying and thing (for in Paris the thing and its saying are like the horse and its rider) ricochetted, so to speak, to this company. Monsieur Minard was always impatiently expected, for he was certain to know the truth of important circumstances. The women of the Thuillier salon

held by the Jesuits; the men defended the University; and, as a general thing, the women listened. A man of intelligence (could he have borne the dulness of these evenings) would have laughed, as he would at a comedy of Moliere, on hearing, amid endless discussion, such remarks as the following: —

"How could the Revolution of 1789 have been avoided? The loans of Louis XIV. prepared the way for it. Louis XV., an egotist, a man of narrow mind (didn't he say, 'If I were lieutenant of police I would suppress cabriolets'?), that dissolute king – you remember his Parc aux Cerfs? – did much to open the abyss of revolution. Monsieur de Necker, an evil-minded Genovese, set the thing a-going. Foreigners have always tried to injure France. The maximum did great harm to the Revolution. Legally Louis XVI. should never have been condemned; a jury would have acquitted him. Why did Charles X. fall? Napoleon was a great man, and the facts that prove his genius are anecdotal: he took five pinches of snuff a minute out of a pocket lined with leather made in his waistcoat. He looked into all his tradesmen's accounts; he went to Saint-Denis to judge for himself the prices of things. Talma was his friend; Talma taught him his gestures; nevertheless, he always refused to give Talma the Legion of honor! The emperor mounted guard for a sentinel who went to sleep, to save him from being shot. Those were the things that made his soldiers adore him. Louis XVIII., who certainly had some sense, was very unjust in calling him Monsieur de Buonaparte. The defect of the present government is in letting

itself be led instead of leading. It holds itself too low. It is afraid of men of energy. It ought to have torn up all the treaties of 1815 and demanded the Rhine. They keep the same men too long in the ministry"; etc., etc.

"Come, you've exerted your minds long enough," said Mademoiselle Thuillier, interrupting one of these luminous talks; "the altar is dressed; begin your little game."

If these anterior facts and all these generalities were not placed here as the frame of the present Scene, to give an idea of the spirit of this society, the following drama would certainly have suffered greatly. Moreover, this sketch is historically faithful; it shows a social stratum of importance in any portrayal of manners and morals, especially when we reflect that the political system of the Younger branch rests almost wholly upon it.

The winter of the year 1839 was, it may be said, the period when the Thuillier salon was in its greatest glory. The Minards came nearly every Sunday, and began their evening by spending an hour there, if they had other engagements elsewhere. Often Minard would leave his wife at the Thuilliers and take his son and daughter to other houses. This assiduity on the part of the Minards was brought about by a somewhat tardy meeting between Messieurs Metivier, Barbet, and Minard on an evening when the two former, being tenants of Mademoiselle Thuillier, remained rather longer than usual in discussing business with her. From Barbet, Minard learned that the old maid had money transactions with himself and Metivier to the amount of sixty

thousand francs, besides having a large deposit in the Bank.

"Has she an account at the Bank?" asked Minard.

"I believe so," replied Barbet. "I give her at least eighty thousand francs there."

Being on intimate terms with a governor of the Bank, Minard ascertained that Mademoiselle Thuillier had, in point of fact, an account of over two hundred thousand francs, the result of her quarterly deposits for many years. Besides this, she owned the house they lived in, which was not mortgaged, and was worth at least one hundred thousand francs, if not more.

"Why should Mademoiselle Thuillier work in this way?" said Minard to Metivier. "She'd be a good match for you," he added.

"I? oh, no," replied Metivier. "I shall do better by marrying a cousin; my uncle Metivier has given me the succession to his business; he has a hundred thousand francs a year and only two daughters."

However secretive Mademoiselle Thuillier might be, – and she said nothing of her investments to any one, not even to her brother, although a large amount of Madame Thuillier's fortune went to swell the amount of her own savings, – it was difficult to prevent some ray of light from gliding under the bushel which covered her treasure.

Dutocq, who frequented Barbet, with whom he had some resemblance in character and countenance, had appraised, even more correctly than Minard, the Thuillier finances. He knew that their savings amounted, in 1838, to one hundred and

fifty thousand francs, and he followed their progress secretly, calculating profits by the help of that all-wise money-lender, Barbet.

"Celeste will have from my brother and myself two hundred thousand francs in ready money," the old maid had said to Barbet in confidence, "and Madame Thuillier wishes to secure to her by the marriage contract the ultimate possession of her own fortune. As for me, my will is made. My brother will have everything during his lifetime, and Celeste will be my heiress with that reservation. Monsieur Cardot, the notary, is my executor."

Mademoiselle Thuillier now instigated her brother to renew his former relations with the Saillards, Baudoyers, and others, who held a position similar to that of the Thuilliers in the quartier Saint-Antoine, of which Monsieur Saillard was mayor. Cardot, the notary, had produced his aspirant for Celeste's hand in the person of Monsieur Godeschal, attorney and successor to Derville; an able man, thirty-six years of age, who had paid one hundred thousand francs for his practice, which the two hundred thousand of the "dot" would doubly clear off. Minard, however, got rid of Godeschal by informing Mademoiselle Thuillier that Celeste's sister-in-law would be the famous Mariette of the Opera.

"She came from the stage," said Colleville, alluding to his wife, "and there's no need she should return to it."

"Besides, Monsieur Godeschal is too old for Celeste," remarked Brigitte.

"And ought we not," added Madame Thuillier, timidly, "to let her marry according to her own taste, so as to be happy?"

The poor woman had detected in Felix Phellion a true love for Celeste; the love that a woman crushed by Brigitte and wounded by her husband's indifference (for Thuillier cared less for his wife than he did for a servant) had dreamed that love might be, – bold in heart, timid externally, sure of itself, reserved, hidden from others, but expanding toward heaven. At twenty-three years of age, Felix Phellion was a gentle, pure-minded young man, like all true scholars who cultivate knowledge for knowledge's sake. He had been sacredly brought up by his father, who, viewing all things seriously, had given him none but good examples accompanied by trivial maxims. He was a young man of medium height, with light chestnut hair, gray eyes, and a skin full of freckles; gifted with a charming voice, a tranquil manner; making few gestures; thoughtful, saying little, and that little sensible; contradicting no one, and quite incapable of a sordid thought or a selfish calculation.

"That," thought Madame Thuillier, "is what I should have liked my husband to be."

One evening, in the month of February, 1840, the Thuillier salon contained the various personages whose silhouettes we have just traced out, together with some others. It was nearly the end of the month. Barbet and Metivier having business with mademoiselle Brigitte, were playing whist with Minard and Phellion. At another table were Julien the advocate (a nickname

given by Colleville to young Minard), Madame Colleville, Monsieur Barniol, and Madame Phellion. "Bouillotte," at five sous a stake, occupied Madame Minard, who knew no other game, Colleville, old Monsieur Saillard, and Bandoze, his son-in-law. The substitutes were Laudigeois and Dutocq. Mesdames Falleix, Baudoyer, Barniol, and Mademoiselle Minard were playing boston, and Celeste was sitting beside Prudence Minard. Young Phellion was listening to Madame Thuillier and looking at Celeste.

At a corner of the fireplace sat enthroned on a sofa the Queen Elizabeth of the family, as simply dressed as she had been for the last thirty years; for no prosperity could have made her change her habits. She wore on her chinchilla hair a black gauze cap, adorned with the geranium called Charles X.; her gown, of plum-colored stuff, made with a yoke, cost fifteen francs, her embroidered collarette was worth six, and it ill disguised the deep wrinkle produced by the two muscles which fastened the head to the vertebral column. The actor, Monvel, playing Augustus Caesar in his old age, did not present a harder and sterner profile than that of this female autocrat, knitting socks for her brother. Before the fireplace stood Thuillier in an attitude, ready to go forward and meet the arriving guests; near him was a young man whose entrance had produced a great effect, when the porter (who on Sundays wore his best clothes and waited on the company) announced Monsieur Olivier Vinet.

A private communication made by Cardot to the celebrated

"procureur-general," father of this young man, was the cause of his visit. Olivier Vinet had just been promoted from the court of Arcis-sur-Aube to that of the Seine, where he now held the post of substitute "procureur-de-roi." Cardot had already invited Thuillier and the elder Vinet, who was likely to become minister of justice, with his son, to dine with him. The notary estimated the fortunes which would eventually fall to Celeste at seven hundred thousand francs. Vinet junior appeared charmed to obtain the right to visit the Thuilliers on Sundays. Great dowries make men commit great and unbecoming follies without reserve or decency in these days.

Ten minutes later another young man, who had been talking with Thuillier before the arrival of Olivier Vinet, raised his voice eagerly, in a political discussion, and forced the young magistrate to follow his example in the vivacious argument which now ensued. The matter related to the vote by which the Chamber of Deputies had just overthrown the ministry of the 12th of May, refusing the allowance demanded for the Duc de Nemours.

"Assuredly," said the young man, "I am far from belonging to the dynastic party; I am very far from approving of the rise of the bourgeoisie to power. The bourgeoisie ought not, any more than the aristocracy of other days, to assume to be the whole nation. But the French bourgeoisie has now taken upon itself to create a new dynasty, a royalty of its own, and behold how it treats it! When the people allowed Napoleon to rise to power, it created with him a splendid and monumental state of things; it was proud

of his grandeur; and it nobly gave its blood and sweat in building up the edifice of the Empire. Between the magnificence of the aristocratic throne and those of the imperial purple, between the great of the earth and the People, the bourgeoisie is proving itself petty; it degrades power to its own level instead of rising up to it. The saving of candle-ends it has so long practised behind its counters, it now seeks to impose on its princes. What may perhaps have been virtue in its shops is a blunder and a crime higher up. I myself have wanted many things for the people, but I never should have begun by lopping off ten millions of francs from the new civil list. In becoming, as it were, nearly the whole of France, the bourgeoisie owed to us the prosperity of the people, splendor without ostentation, grandeur without privilege."

The father of Olivier Vinet was just now sulking with the government. The robe of Keeper of the Seals, which had been his dream, was slow in coming to him. The young substitute did not, therefore, know exactly how to answer this speech; he thought it wise to enlarge on one of its side issues.

"You are right, monsieur," said Olivier Vinet. "But, before manifesting itself magnificently, the bourgeoisie has other duties to fulfil towards France. The luxury you speak of should come after duty. That which seems to you so blameable is the necessity of the moment. The Chamber is far from having its full share in public affairs; the ministers are less for France than they are for the crown, and parliament has determined that the administration

shall have, as in England, a strength and power of its own, and not a mere borrowed power. The day on which the administration can act for itself, and represent the Chamber as the Chamber represents the country, parliament will be found very liberal toward the crown. The whole question is there. I state it without expressing my own opinion, for the duties of my post demand, in politics, a certain fealty to the crown."

"Setting aside the political question," replied the young man, whose voice and accent were those of a native of Provence, "it is certainly true that the bourgeoisie has ill understood its mission. We can see, any day, the great law officers, attorney-generals, peers of France in omnibuses, judges who live on their salaries, prefects without fortunes, ministers in debt! Whereas the bourgeoisie, who have seized upon those offices, ought to dignify them, as in the olden time when aristocracy dignified them, and not occupy such posts solely for the purpose of making their fortune, as scandalous disclosures have proved."

"Who is this young man?" thought Olivier Vinet. "Is he a relative? Cardot ought to have come with me on this first visit."

"Who is that little monsieur?" asked Minard of Barbet. "I have seen him here several times."

"He is a tenant," replied Metivier, shuffling the cards.

"A lawyer," added Barbet, in a low voice, "who occupies a small apartment on the third floor front. Oh! *He* doesn't amount to much; he has nothing."

"What is the name of that young man?" said Olivier Vinet to

Thuillier.

"Theodose de la Peyrade; he is a barrister," replied Thuillier, in a whisper.

At that moment the women present, as well as the men, looked at the two young fellows, and Madame Minard remarked to Colleville: —

"He is rather good-looking, that stranger."

"I have made his anagram," replied Colleville, "and his name, Charles-Marie-Theodose de la Peyrade, prophecies: 'Eh! monsieur payera, de la dot, des oies et le char.' Therefore, my dear Mamma Minard, be sure you don't give him your daughter."

"They say that young man is better-looking than my son," said Madame Phellion to Madame Colleville. "What do you think about it?"

"Oh! in the matter of physical beauty a woman might hesitate before choosing," replied Madame Colleville.

At that moment it occurred to young Vinet as he looked round the salon, so full of the lesser bourgeoisie, that it might be a shrewd thing to magnify that particular class; and he thereupon enlarged upon the meaning of the young Provencal barrister, declaring that men so honored by the confidence of the government should imitate royalty and encourage a magnificence surpassing that of the former court. It was folly, he said, to lay by the emoluments of an office. Besides, could it be done, in Paris especially, where costs of living had trebled, – the apartment of a magistrate, for instance, costing three thousand francs a year?

"My father," he said in conclusion, "allows me three thousand francs a year, and that, with my salary, barely allows me to maintain my rank."

When the young substitute rode boldly into this bog-hole, the Provencal, who had slyly enticed him there, exchanged, without being observed, a wink with Dutocq, who was just then waiting for the place of a player at bouillotte.

"There is such a demand for offices," remarked the latter, "that they talk of creating two justices of the peace to each arrondissement in order to make a dozen new clerkships. As if they could interfere with our rights and our salaries, which already require an exhorbitant tax!"

"I have not yet had the pleasure of hearing you at the Palais," said Vinet to Monsieur de la Peyrade.

"I am advocate for the poor, and I plead only before the justice of peace," replied la Peyrade.

Mademoiselle Thuillier, as she listened to young Vinet's theory of the necessity of spending an income, assumed a distant air and manner, the significance of which was well understood by Dutocq and the young Provencal. Vinet left the house in company with Minard and Julien the advocate, so that the battle-field before the fire-place was abandoned to la Peyrade and Dutocq.

"The upper bourgeoisie," said Dutocq to Thuillier, "will behave, in future, exactly like the old aristocracy. The nobility wanted girls with money to manure their lands, and the parvenus

of to-day want the same to feather their nests."

"That's exactly what Monsieur Thuillier was saying to me this morning," remarked la Peyrade, boldly.

"Vinet's father," said Dutocq, "married a Demoiselle de Chargeboeuf and has caught the opinions of the nobility; he wants a fortune at any price; his wife spends money regally."

"Oh!" said Thuillier, in whom the jealousy between the two classes of the bourgeoisie was fully roused, "take offices away from those fellows and they'd fall back where they came."

Mademoiselle was knitting with such precipitous haste that she seemed to be propelled by a steam-engine.

"Take my place, Monsieur Dutocq," said Madame Minard, rising. "My feet are cold," she added, going to the fire, where the golden ornaments of her turban made fireworks in the light of the Saint-Aurora wax-candles that were struggling vainly to light the vast salon.

"He is very small fry, that young substitute," said Madame Minard, glancing at Mademoiselle Thuillier.

"Small fry!" cried la Peyrade. "Ah, madame! how witty!"

"But madame has so long accustomed us to that sort of thing," said the handsome Thuillier.

Madame Colleville was examining la Peyrade and comparing him with young Phellion, who was just then talking to Celeste, neither of them paying any heed to what was going on around them. This is, certainly, the right moment to depict the singular personage who was destined to play a signal part in the Thuillier

household, and who fully deserves the appellation of a great artist.

CHAPTER V. A PRINCIPAL PERSONAGE

There exists in Provence, especially about Avignon, a race of men with blond or chestnut hair, fair skin, and eyes that are almost tender, their pupils calm, feeble, or languishing, rather than keen, ardent, or profound, as they usually are in the eyes of Southerners. Let us remark, in passing, that among Corsicans, a race subject to fits of anger and dangerous irascibility, we often meet with fair skins and physical natures of the same apparent tranquillity. These pale men, rather stout, with somewhat dim and hazy eyes either green or blue, are the worst species of humanity in Provence; and Charles-Marie-Theodose de la Peyrade presents a fine type of that race, the constitution of which deserves careful examination on the part of medical science and philosophical physiology. There rises, at times, within such men, a species of bile, – a bitter gall, which flies to their head and makes them capable of ferocious actions, done, apparently, in cold blood. Being the result of an inward intoxication, this sort of dumb violence seems to be irreconcilable with their quasi-lymphatic outward man, and the tranquillity of their benignant glance.

Born in the neighborhood of Avignon, the young Provencal whose name we have just mentioned was of middle height, well-proportioned, and rather stout; the tone of his skin had

no brilliancy; it was neither livid nor dead-white, nor colored, but gelatinous, – that word can alone give a true idea of the flabby, hueless envelope, beneath which were concealed nerves that were less vigorous than capable of enormous resistance at certain given moments. His eyes, of a pale cold blue, expressed in their ordinary condition a species of deceptive sadness, which must have had great charms for women. The forehead, finely cut, was not without dignity, and it harmonized well with the soft, light chestnut hair curling naturally, but slightly, at its tips. The nose, precisely like that of a hunting dog, flat and furrowed at the tip, inquisitive, intelligent, searching, always on the scent, instead of expressing good-humor, was ironical and mocking; but this particular aspect of his nature never showed itself openly; the young man must have ceased to watch himself, he must have flown into fury before the power came to him to flash out the sarcasm and the wit which embittered, tenfold, his infernal humor. The mouth, the curving lines and pomegranate-colored lips of which were very pleasing, seemed the admirable instrument of an organ that was almost sweet in its middle tones, where its owner usually kept it, but which, in its higher key, vibrated on the ear like the sound of a gong. This falsetto was the voice of his nerves and his anger. His face, kept expressionless by an inward command, was oval in form. His manners, in harmony with the sacerdotal calmness of the face, were reserved and conventional; but he had supple, pliant ways which, though they never descended to wheedling, were not lacking in seduction;

although as soon as his back was turned their charm seemed inexplicable. Charm, when it takes its rise in the heart, leaves deep and lasting traces; that which is merely a product of art, or of eloquence, has only a passing power; it produces its immediate effect, and that is all. But how many philosophers are there in life who are able to distinguish the difference? Almost always the trick is played (to use a popular expression) before the ordinary run of men have perceived its methods.

Everything about this young man of twenty-seven was in harmony with his character; he obeyed his vocation by cultivating philanthropy, – the only expression which explains the philanthropist. Theodose loved the People, for he limited his love for humanity. Like the horticulturist who devotes himself to roses, or dahlias, or heart's-ease, or geraniums, and pays no attention to the plants his fancy has not selected, so this young La Rochefoucault-Liancourt gave himself to the workingmen, the proletariat and the paupers of the faubourgs Saint-Jacques and Saint-Marceau. The strong man, the man of genius at bay, the worthy poor of the bourgeois class, he cut them off from the bosom of his charity. The heart of all persons with a mania is like those boxes with compartments, in which sugarplums are kept in sorts: "suum cuique tribuere" is their motto; they measure to each duty its dose. There are some philanthropists who pity nothing but the man condemned to death. Vanity is certainly the basis of philanthropy; but in the case of this Provencal it was calculation, a predetermined course, a "liberal" and democratic hypocrisy,

played with a perfection that no other actor will ever attain.

Theodose did not attack the rich; he contented himself with not understanding them; he endured them; every one, in his opinion, ought to enjoy the fruits of his labor. He had been, he said, a fervent disciple of Saint-Simon, but that mistake must be attributed to his youth: modern society could have no other basis than heredity. An ardent Catholic, like all men from the Comtat, he went to the earliest morning masses, and thus concealed his piety. Like other philanthropists, he practised a sordid economy, and gave to the poor his time, his legal advice, his eloquence, and such money as he extracted for them from the rich. His clothes, always of black cloth, were worn until the seams became white. Nature had done a great deal for Theodose in not giving him that fine manly Southern beauty which creates in others an imaginary expectation, to which it is more than difficult for a man to respond. As it was, he could be what suited him at the moment, – an agreeable man or a very ordinary one. Never, since his admission to the Thuilliers', had he ventured, till this evening, to raise his voice and speak as dogmatically as he had risked doing to Olivier Vinet; but perhaps Theodose de la Peyrade was not sorry to seize the opportunity to come out from the shade in which he had hitherto kept himself. Besides, it was necessary to get rid of the young substitute, just as the Minards had previously ruined the hopes of Monsieur Godeschal. Like all superior men (for he certainly had some superiority), Vinet had never lowered himself to the point where the threads of these bourgeois spider-

webs became visible to him, and he had therefore plunged, like a fly, headforemost, into the almost invisible trap to which Theodose inveigled him.

To complete this portrait of the poor man's lawyer we must here relate the circumstances of his first arrival at the Thuilliers'.

Theodose came to lodge in Mademoiselle Thuillier's house toward the close of the year 1837. He had taken his degree about five years earlier, and had kept the proper number of terms to become a barrister. Circumstances, however, about which he said nothing, had interfered to prevent his being called to the bar; he was, therefore, still a licentiate. But soon after he was installed in the little apartment on the third floor, with the furniture rigorously required by all members of his noble profession, – for the guild of barristers admits no brother unless he has a suitable study, a legal library, and can thus, as it were, verify his claims, – Theodose de la Peyrade began to practise as a barrister before the Royal Court of Paris.

The whole of the year 1838 was employed in making this change in his condition, and he led a most regular life. He studied at home in the mornings till dinner-time, going sometimes to the Palais for important cases. Having become very intimate with Dutocq (so Dutocq said), he did certain services to the poor of the faubourg Saint-Jacques who were brought to his notice by that official. He pleaded their cases before the court, after bringing them to the notice of the attorneys, who, according to the statutes of their order, are obliged to take turns in doing

business for the poor. As Theodose was careful to plead only safe cases, he won them all. Those persons whom he thus obliged expressed their gratitude and their admiration, in spite of the young lawyer's admonitions, among their own class, and to the porters of private houses, through whom many anecdotes rose to the ears of the proprietors. Delighted to have in their house a tenant so worthy and so charitable, the Thuilliers wished to attract him to their salon, and they questioned Dutocq about him. The mayor's clerk replied as the envious reply; while doing justice to the young man he dwelt on his remarkable avarice, which might, however, be the effect of poverty.

"I have had other information about him. He belongs to the Peyrades, an old family of the 'comtat' of Avignon; he came here toward the end of 1829, to inquire about an uncle whose fortune was said to be considerable; he discovered the address of the old man only three days before his death; and the furniture of the deceased merely sufficed to bury him and pay his debts. A friend of this useless uncle gave a couple of hundred louis to the poor fortune-hunter, advising him to finish his legal studies and enter the judiciary career. Those two hundred louis supported him for three years in Paris, where he lived like an anchorite. But being unable to discover his unknown friend and benefactor, the poor student was in abject distress in 1833. He worked then, like so many other licentiates, in politics and literature, by which he kept himself for a time above want – for he had nothing to expect from his family. His father, the youngest brother of

the dead uncle, has eleven other children, who live on a small estate called Les Canquoelles. He finally obtained a place on a ministerial newspaper, the manager of which was the famous Cerizet, so celebrated for the persecutions he met with, under the Restoration, on account of his attachment to the liberals, – a man whom the new Left will never forgive for having made his paper ministerial. As the government of these days does very little to protect even its most devoted servants (witness the Gisquet affair), the republicans have ended by ruining Cerizet. I tell you this to explain how it is that Cerizet is now a copying clerk in my office. Well, in the days when he flourished as managing editor of a paper directed by the Perier ministry against the incendiary journals, the 'Tribune' and others, Cerizet, who is a worthy fellow after all, though he is too fond of women, pleasure, and good living, was very useful to Theodose, who edited the political department of the paper; and if it hadn't been for the death of Casimir Perier that young man would certainly have received an appointment as substitute judge in Paris. As it was, he dropped back in 1834-35, in spite of his talent; for his connection with a ministerial journal of course did him harm. 'If it had not been for my religious principles,' he said to me, 'I should have thrown myself into the Seine.' However, it seems that the friend of his uncle must have heard of his distress, for again he sent him a sum of money; enough to complete his terms for the bar; but, strange to say, he has never known the name or the address of this mysterious benefactor. After all, perhaps, under

such circumstances, his economy is excusable, and he must have great strength of mind to refuse what the poor devils whose cases he wins by his devotion offer him. He is indignant at the way other lawyers speculate on the possibility or impossibility of poor creatures, unjustly sued, paying for the costs of their defence. Oh! he'll succeed in the end. I shouldn't be surprised to see that fellow in some very brilliant position; he has tenacity, honesty, and courage. He studies, he delves."

Notwithstanding the favor with which he was greeted, la Peyrade went discreetly to the Thuilliers'. When reproached for this reserve he went oftener, and ended by appearing every Sunday; he was invited to all dinner-parties, and became at last so familiar in the house that whenever he came to see Thuillier about four o'clock he was always requested to take "pot-luck" without ceremony. Mademoiselle Thuillier used to say: —

"Then we know that he will get a good dinner, poor fellow!"

A social phenomenon which has certainly been observed, but never, as yet, formulated, or, if you like it better, published, though it fully deserves to be recorded, is the return of habits, mind, and manners to primitive conditions in certain persons who, between youth and old age, have raised themselves above their first estate. Thus Thuillier had become, once more, morally speaking, the son of a concierge. He now made use of many of his father's jokes, and a little of the slime of early days was beginning to appear on the surface of his declining life. About five or six times a month, when the soup was rich and good he

would deposit his spoon in his empty plate and say, as if the proposition were entirely novel: —

"That's better than a kick on the shin-bone!"

On hearing that witticism for the first time Theodose, to whom it was really new, laughed so heartily that the handsome Thuillier was tickled in his vanity as he had never been before. After that, Theodose greeted the same speech with a knowing little smile. This slight detail will explain how it was that on the morning of the day when Theodose had his passage at arms with Vinet he had said to Thuillier, as they were walking in the garden to see the effect of a frost: —

"You have much more wit than you give yourself credit for."

To which he received this answer: —

"In any other career, my dear Theodose, I should have made my way nobly; but the fall of the Emperor broke my neck."

"There is still time," said the young lawyer. "In the first place, what did that mountebank, Colleville, ever do to get the cross?"

There la Peyrade laid his finger on a sore wound which Thuillier hid from every eye so carefully that even his sister did not know of it; but the young man, interested in studying these bourgeois, had divined the secret envy that gnawed at the heart of the ex-official.

"If you, experienced as you are, will do the honor to follow my advice," added the philanthropist, "and, above all, not mention our compact to any one, I will undertake to have you decorated with the Legion of honor, to the applause of the whole quarter."

"Oh! if we succeed in that," cried Thuillier, "you don't know what I would do for you."

This explains why Thuillier carried his head high when Theodose had the audacity that evening to put opinions into his mouth.

In art – and perhaps Moliere had placed hypocrisy in the rank of art by classing Tartuffe forever among comedians – there exists a point of perfection to which genius alone attains; mere talent falls below it. There is so little difference between a work of genius and a work of talent, that only men of genius can appreciate the distance that separates Raffaelle from Correggio, Titian from Rubens. More than that; common minds are easily deceived on this point. The sign of genius is a certain appearance of facility. In fact, its work must appear, at first sight, ordinary, so natural is it, even on the highest subjects. Many peasant-women hold their children as the famous Madonna in the Dresden gallery holds hers. Well, the height of art in a man of la Peyrade's force was to oblige others to say of him later: "Everybody would have been taken in by him."

Now, in the salon Thuillier, he noted a dawning opposition; he perceived in Colleville the somewhat clear-sighted and criticising nature of an artist who has missed his vocation. The barrister felt himself displeasing to Colleville, who (as the result of circumstances not necessary to here report) considered himself justified in believing in the science of anagrams. None of this anagrams had ever failed. The clerks in the government office

had laughed at him when, demanding an anagram on the name of the poor helpless Auguste-Jean-Francois Minard, he had produced, "J'amassai une si grande fortune"; and the event had justified him after the lapse of ten years! Theodose, on several occasions, had made advances to the jovial secretary of the mayor's office, and had felt himself rebuffed by a coldness which was not natural in so sociable a man. When the game of bouillotte came to an end, Colleville seized the moment to draw Thuillier into the recess of a window and say to him: —

"You are letting that lawyer get too much foothold in your house; he kept the ball in his own hands all the evening."

"Thank you, my friend; forewarned is forearmed," replied Thuillier, inwardly scoffing at Colleville.

Theodose, who was talking at the moment to Madame Colleville, had his eye on the two men, and, with the same prescience by which women know when and how they are spoken of, he perceived that Colleville was trying to injure him in the mind of the weak and silly Thuillier. "Madame," he said in Flavie's ear, "if any one here is capable of appreciating you it is certainly I. You seem to me a pearl dropped into the mire. You say you are forty-two, but a woman is no older than she looks, and many women of thirty would be thankful to have your figure and that noble countenance, where love has passed without ever filling the void in your heart. You have given yourself to God, I know, and I have too much religion myself to regret it, but I also know that you have done so because no human

being has proved worthy of you. You have been loved, but you have never been adored – I have divined that. There is your husband, who has not known how to please you in a position in keeping with your deserts. He dislikes me, as if he thought I loved you; and he prevents me from telling you of a way that I think I have found to place you in the sphere for which you were destined. No, madame," he continued, rising, "the Abbe Gondrin will not preach this year through Lent at our humble Saint-Jacques du Haut-Pas; the preacher will be Monsieur d'Estival, a compatriot of mine, and you will hear in him one of the most impressive speakers that I have ever known, – a priest whose outward appearance is not agreeable, but, oh! what a soul!"

"Then my desire will be gratified," said poor Madame Thuillier. "I have never yet been able to understand a famous preacher."

A smile flickered on the lips of Mademoiselle Thuillier and several others who heard the remark.

"They devote themselves too much to theological demonstration," said Theodose. "I have long thought so myself – but I never talk religion; if it had not been for Madame *de* Colleville, I – "

"Are there demonstrations in theology?" asked the professor of mathematics, naively, plunging headlong into the conversation.

"I think, monsieur," replied Theodose, looking straight at Felix Phellion, "that you cannot be serious in asking me such a

question."

"Felix," said old Phellion, coming heavily to the rescue of his son, and catching a distressed look on the pale face of Madame Thuillier, – "Felix separates religion into two categories; he considers it from the human point of view and the divine point of view, – tradition and reason."

"That is heresy, monsieur," replied Theodose. "Religion is one; it requires, above all things, faith."

Old Phellion, nonplussed by that remark, nodded to his wife: —

"It is getting late, my dear," and he pointed to the clock.

"Oh, Monsieur Felix," said Celeste in a whisper to the candid mathematician, "Couldn't you be, like Pascal and Bossuet, learned and pious both?"

The Phellions, on departing, carried the Collevilles with them. Soon no one remained in the salon but Dutocq, Theodose, and the Thuilliers.

The flattery administered by Theodose to Flavie seems at the first sight coarsely commonplace, but we must here remark, in the interests of this history, that the barrister was keeping himself as close as possible to these vulgar minds; he was navigating their waters; he spoke their language. His painter was Pierre Grassou, and not Joseph Bridau; his book was "Paul and Virginia." The greatest living poet for him was Casimire de la Vigne; to his eyes the mission of art was, above all things, utility. Parmentier, the discoverer of the potato, was greater to him that thirty Raffaelles;

the man in the blue cloak seemed to him a sister of charity. These were Thuillier's expressions, and Theodose remembered them all – on occasion.

"That young Felix Phellion," he now remarked, "is precisely the academical man of our day; the product of knowledge which sends God to the rear. Heavens, what are we coming to? Religion alone can save France; nothing but the fear of hell will preserve us from domestic robbery, which is going on at all hours in the bosom of families, and eating into the surest fortunes. All of you have a secret warfare in your homes."

After this shrewd tirade, which made a great impression upon Brigitte, he retired, followed by Dutocq, after wishing good evening to the three Thuilliers.

"That young man has great capacity," said Thuillier, sententiously.

"Yes, that he has," replied Brigitte, extinguishing the lamps.

"He has religion," said Madame Thuillier, as she left the room.

"Monsieur," Phellion was saying to Colleville as they came abreast of the Ecole de Mines, looking about him to see that no one was near, "it is usually my custom to submit my insight to that of others, but it is impossible for me not to think that that young lawyer plays the master at our friend Thuillier's."

"My own opinion," said Colleville, who was walking with Phellion behind his wife, Madame Phellion, and Celeste, "is that he's a Jesuit; and I don't like Jesuits; the best of them are no good. To my mind a Jesuit means knavery, and knavery for knavery's

sake; they deceive for the pleasure of deceiving, and, as the saying is, to keep their hand in. That's my opinion, and I don't mince it."

"I understand you, monsieur," said Phellion, who was arm-in-arm with Colleville.

"No, Monsieur Phellion," remarked Flavie in a shrill voice, "you don't understand Colleville; but I know what he means, and I think he had better stop saying it. Such subjects are not to be talked of in the street, at eleven o'clock at night, and before a young lady."

"You are right, wife," said Colleville.

When they reached the rue des Deux-Eglises, which Phellion was to take, they all stopped to say good-night, and Felix Phellion, who was bring up the rear, said to Colleville: —

"Monsieur, your son Francois could enter the Ecole Polytechnique if he were well-coached; I propose to you to fit him to pass the examinations this year."

"That's an offer not to be refused! Thank you, my friend," said Colleville. "We'll see about it."

"Good!" said Phellion to his son, as they walked on.

"Not a bad stroke!" said the mother.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Felix.

"You are very cleverly paying court to Celeste's parents."

"May I never find the solution of my problem if I even thought of it!" cried the young professor. "I discovered, when talking with the little Collevilles, that Francois has a strong turn for

mathematics, and I thought I ought to enlighten his father."

"Good, my son!" repeated Phellion. "I wouldn't have you otherwise. My prayers are granted! I have a son whose honor, probity, and private and civic virtues are all that I could wish."

Madame Colleville, as soon as Celeste had gone to bed, said to her husband: —

"Colleville, don't utter those blunt opinions about people without knowing something about them. When you talk of Jesuits I know you mean priests; and I wish you would do me the kindness to keep your opinions on religion to yourself when you are in company with your daughter. We may sacrifice our own souls, but not the souls of our children. You don't want Celeste to be a creature without religion? And remember, my dear, that we are at the mercy of others; we have four children to provide for; and how do you know that, some day or other, you may not need the services of this one or that one? Therefore don't make enemies. You haven't any now, for you are a good-natured fellow; and, thanks to that quality, which amounts in you to a charm, we have got along pretty well in life, so far."

"That's enough!" said Colleville, flinging his coat on a chair and pulling off his cravat. "I'm wrong, and you are right, my beautiful Flavie."

"And on the next occasion, my dear old sheep," said the sly creature, tapping her husband's cheek, "you must try to be polite to that young lawyer; he is a schemer and we had better have him on our side. He is playing comedy – well! play comedy with him;

be his dupe apparently; if he proves to have talent, if he has a future before him, make a friend of him. Do you think I want to see you forever in the mayor's office?"

"Come, wife Colleville," said the former clarionet, tapping his knee to indicate the place he wished his wife to take. "Let us warm our toes and talk. – When I look at you I am more than ever convinced that the youth of women is in their figure."

"And in their heart."

"Well, both," assented Colleville; "waist slender, heart solid – "

"No, you old stupid, deep."

"What is good about you is that you have kept your fairness without growing fat. But the fact is, you have such tiny bones. Flavie, it is a fact that if I had life to live over again I shouldn't wish for any other wife than you."

"You know very well I have always preferred you to *others*. How unlucky that monseigneur is dead! Do you know what I covet for you?"

"No; what?"

"Some office at the Hotel de Ville, – an office worth twelve thousand francs a year; cashier, or something of that kind; either there, or at Poissy, in the municipal department; or else as manufacturer of musical instruments – "

"Any one of them would suit me."

"Well, then! if that queer barrister has power, and he certainly has plenty of intrigue, let us manage him. I'll sound him; leave

me to do the thing – and, above all, don't thwart his game at the Thuilliers'."

Theodose had laid a finger on a sore sport in Flavie Colleville's heart; and this requires an explanation, which may, perhaps, have the value of a synthetic glance at women's life.

At forty years of age a woman, above all, if she has tasted the poisoned apple of passion, undergoes a solemn shock; she sees two deaths before her: that of the body and that of the heart. Dividing women into two great categories which respond to the common ideas, and calling them either virtuous or guilty, it is allowable to say that after that fatal period they both suffer pangs of terrible intensity. If virtuous, and disappointed in the deepest hopes of their nature – whether they have had the courage to submit, whether they have buried their revolt in their hearts or at the foot of the altar – they never admit to themselves that all is over for them without horror. That thought has such strange and diabolical depths that in it lies the reason of some of those apostasies which have, at times, amazed the world and horrified it. If guilty, women of that age fall into one of several delirious conditions which often turn, alas! to madness, or end in suicide, or terminate in some with passion greater than the situation itself.

The following is the "dilemmatic" meaning of this crisis. Either they have known happiness, known it in a virtuous life, and are unable to breathe in any air but that surcharged with incense, or act in any but a balmy atmosphere of flattery and worship, – if so, how is it possible to renounce it? – or, by a phenomenon

less rare than singular, they have found only wearying pleasures while seeking for the happiness that escaped them – sustained in that eager chase by the irritating satisfactions of vanity, clinging to the game like a gambler to his double or quits; for to them these last days of beauty are their last stake against despair.

"You have been loved, but never adored."

That speech of Theodose, accompanied by a look which read, not into her heart, but into her life, was the key-note to her enigma, and Flavie felt herself divined.

The lawyer had merely repeated ideas which literature has rendered trivial; but what matter where the whip comes from, or how it is made, if it touches the sensitive spot of a horse's hide? The emotion was in Flavie, not in the speech, just as the noise is not in the avalanche, though it produces it.

A young officer, two fops, a banker, a clumsy youth, and Colleville, were poor attempts at happiness. Once in her life Madame Colleville had dreamed of it, but never attained it. Death had hastened to put an end to the only passion in which she had found a charm. For the last two years she had listened to the voice of religion, which told her that neither the Church, nor its votaries, should talk of love or happiness, but of duty and resignation; that the only happiness lay in the satisfaction of fulfilling painful and costly duties, the rewards for which were not in this world. All the same, however, she was conscious of another clamoring voice; but, inasmuch as her religion was only a mask which it suited her to wear, and not a conversion, she did

not lay it aside, thinking it a resource. Believing also that piety, false or true, was a becoming manner in which to meet her future, she continued in the Church, as though it were the cross-roads of a forest, where, seated on a bench, she read the sign-posts, and waited for some lucky chance; feeling all the while that night was coming on.

Thus it happened that her interest was keenly excited when Theodose put her secret condition of mind into words, seeming to promise her the realization of her castle in the air, already built and overthrown some six or eight times.

From the beginning of the winter she had noticed that Theodose was examining and studying her, though cautiously and secretly. More than once, she had put on her gray moire silk with its black lace, and her headdress of Mechlin with a few flowers, in order to appear to her best advantage; and men know very well when a toilet has been made to please them. The old beau of the Empire, that handsome Thuillier, overwhelmed her with compliments, assuring her she was queen of the salon, but la Peyrade said infinitely more to the purpose by a look.

Flavie had expected, Sunday after Sunday, a declaration, saying to herself at times: —

"He knows I am ruined and haven't a sou. Perhaps he is really pious."

Theodose did nothing rashly; like a wise musician, he had marked the place in his symphony where he intended to tap his drum. When he saw Colleville attempting to warn Thuillier

against him, he fired his broadside, cleverly prepared during the three or four months in which he had been studying Flavie; he now succeeded with her as he had, earlier in the day, succeeded with Thuillier.

While getting into bed, Theodose said to himself: —

"The wife is on my side; the husband can't endure me; they are now quarrelling; and I shall get the better of it, for she does what she likes with that man."

The lawyer was mistaken in one thing: there was no dispute whatever, and Colleville was sleeping peacefully beside his dear little Flavie, while she was saying to herself: —

"Certainly Theodose must be a superior man."

Many men, like la Peyrade, derive their superiority from the audacity, or the difficulty, of an enterprise; the strength they display increases their muscular power, and they spend it freely. Then when success is won, or defeat is met, the public is astonished to find how small, exhausted, and puny those men really are. After casting into the minds of the two persons on whom Celeste's fate chiefly depended, an interest and curiosity that were almost feverish, Theodose pretended to be a very busy man; for five or six days he was out of the house from morning till night, in order not to meet Flavie until the time when her interest should increase to the point of overstepping conventionality, and also in order to force the handsome Thuillier to come and fetch him.

The following Sunday he felt certain he should find Madame

Colleville at church; he was not mistaken, for they came out, each of them, at the same moment, and met at the corner of the rue des Deux-Eglises. Theodose offered his arm, which Flavie accepted, leaving her daughter to walk in front with her brother Anatole. This youngest child, then about twelve years old, being destined for the seminary, was now at the Barniol institute, where he obtained an elementary education; Barniol, the son-in-law of the Phellions, was naturally making the tuition fees light, with a view to the hoped-for alliance between Felix and Celeste.

"Have you done me the honor and favor of thinking over what I said to you so badly the other day?" asked the lawyer, in a caressing tone, pressing the lady's arm to his heart with a movement both soft and strong; for he seemed to wish to restrain himself and appear respectful, in spite of his evident eagerness. "Do not misunderstand my intentions," he continued, after receiving from Madame Colleville one of those looks which women trained to the management of passion know how to give, – a look that, by mere expression, can convey both severe rebuke and secret community of sentiment. "I love you as we love a noble nature struggling against misfortune; Christian charity enfolds both the strong and the weak; its treasure belongs to both. Refined, graceful, elegant as you are, made to be an ornament of the highest society, what man could see you without feeling an immense compassion in his heart – buried here among these odious bourgeois, who know nothing of you, not even the aristocratic value of a single one of your attitudes, or those

enchanting inflections of your voice! Ah! if I were only rich! if I had power! your husband, who is certainly a good fellow, should be made receiver-general, and you yourself could get him elected deputy. But, alas! poor ambitious man, my first duty is to silence my ambition. Knowing myself at the bottom of the bag like the last number in a family lottery, I can only offer you my arm and not my heart. I hope all from a good marriage, and, believe me, I shall make my wife not only happy, but I shall make her one of the first in the land, receiving from her the means of success. It is so fine a day, will you not take a turn in the Luxembourg?" he added, as they reached the rue d'Enfer at the corner of Colleville's house, opposite to which was a passage leading to the gardens by the stairway of a little building, the last remains of the famous convent of the Chartreux.

The soft yielding of the arm within his own, indicated a tacit consent to this proposal, and as Flavie deserved the honor of a sort of enthusiasm, he drew her vehemently along, exclaiming: —

"Come! we may never have so good a moment – But see!" he added, "there is your husband at the window looking at us; let us walk slowly."

"You have nothing to fear from Monsieur Colleville," said Flavie, smiling; "he leaves me mistress of my own actions."

"Ah! here, indeed, is the woman I have dreamed of," cried the Provencal, with that ecstasy that inflames the soul only, and in tones that issue only from Southern lips. "Pardon me, madame," he said, recovering himself, and returning from an

upper sphere to the exiled angel whom he looked at piously, – "pardon me, I abandon what I was saying; but how can a man help feeling for the sorrows he has known himself when he sees them the lot of a being to whom life should bring only joy and happiness? Your sufferings are mine; I am no more in my right place than you are in yours; the same misfortune has made us brother and sister. Ah! dear Flavie, the first day it was granted to me to see you – the last Sunday in September, 1838 – you were very beautiful; I shall often recall you to memory in that pretty little gown of mousseline-de-laine of the color of some Scottish tartan! That day I said to myself: 'Why is that woman so often at the Thuilliers'; above all, why did she ever have intimate relations with Thuillier himself? – '"

"Monsieur!" said Flavie, alarmed at the singular course la Peyrade was giving to the conversation.

"Eh! I know all," he cried, accompanying the words with a shrug of his shoulders. "I explain it all to my own mind, and I do not respect you less. You now have to gather the fruits of your sin, and I will help you. Celeste will be very rich, and in that lies your own future. You can have only one son-in-law; chose him wisely. An ambitious man might become a minister, but you would humble your daughter and make her miserable; and if such a man lost his place and fortune he could never recover it. Yes, I love you," he continued. "I love you with an unlimited affection; you are far above the mass of petty considerations in which silly women entangle themselves. Let us understand each other."

Flavie was bewildered; she was, however, awake to the extreme frankness of such language, and she said to herself, "He is not a secret manoeuvrer, certainly." Moreover, she admitted to her own mind that no one had ever so deeply stirred and excited her as this young man.

"Monsieur," she said, "I do not know who could have put into your mind so great an error as to my life, nor by what right you – "

"Ah! pardon me, madame," interrupted the Provencal with a coolness that smacked of contempt. "I must have dreamed it. I said to myself, 'She is all that!' But I see I was judging from the outside. I know now why you are living and will always live on a fourth floor in the rue d'Enfer."

And he pointed his speech with an energetic gesture toward the Colleville windows, which could be seen through the passage from the alley of the Luxembourg, where they were walking alone, in that immense tract trodden by so many and various young ambitions.

"I have been frank, and I expected reciprocity," resumed Theodose. "I myself have had days without food, madame; I have managed to live, pursue my studies, obtain my degree, with two thousand francs for my sole dependence; and I entered Paris through the Barriere d'Italie, with five hundred francs in my pocket, firmly resolved, like one of my compatriots, to become, some day, one of the foremost men of our country. The man who has often picked his food from baskets of scraps where the restaurateurs put their refuse, which are emptied at six o'clock

every morning – that man is not likely to recoil before any means, – avowable, of course. Well, do you think me the friend of the people?" he said, smiling. "One has to have a speaking-trumpet to reach the ear of Fame; she doesn't listen if you speak with your lips; and without fame of what use is talent? The poor man's advocate means to be some day the advocate of the rich. Is that plain speaking? Don't I open my inmost being to you? Then open your heart to me. Say to me, 'Let us be friends,' and the day will come when we shall both be happy."

"Good heavens! why did I ever come here? Why did I ever take your arm?" cried Flavie.

"Because it is in your destiny," he replied. "Ah! my dear, beloved Flavie," he added, again pressing her arm upon his heart, "did you expect to hear the vulgarities of love from me? We are brother and sister; that is all."

And he led her towards the passage to return to the rue d'Enfer.

Flavie felt a sort of terror in the depths of the contentment which all women find in violent emotions; and she took that terror for the sort of fear which a new passion always excites; but for all that, she felt she was fascinated, and she walked along in absolute silence.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Theodose, when they reached the middle of the passage.

"Of what you have just said to me," she answered.

"At our age," he said, "it is best to suppress preliminaries;

we are not children; we both belong to a sphere in which we should understand each other. Remember this," he added, as they reached the rue d'Enfer. – "I am wholly yours."

So saying, he bowed low to her.

"The iron's in the fire now!" he thought to himself as he watched his giddy prey on her way home.

CHAPTER VI. A KEYNOTE

When Theodose reached home he found, waiting for him on the landing, a personage who is, as it were, the submarine current of this history; he will be found within it like some buried church on which has risen the facade of a palace. The sight of this man, who, after vainly ringing at la Peyrade's door, was now trying that of Dutocq, made the Provencal barrister tremble – but secretly, within himself, not betraying externally his inward emotion. This man was Cerizet, whom Dutocq had mentioned to Thuillier as his copying-clerk.

Cerizet was only thirty-eight years old, but he looked a man of fifty, so aged had he become from causes which age all men. His hairless head had a yellow skull, ill-covered by a rusty, discolored wig; the mask of his face, pale, flabby, and unnaturally rough, seemed the more horrible because the nose was eaten away, though not sufficiently to admit of its being replaced by a false one. From the spring of this nose at the forehead, down to the nostrils, it remained as nature had made it; but disease, after gnawing away the sides near the extremities, had left two holes of fantastic shape, which vitiated pronunciation and hampered speech. The eyes, originally handsome, but weakened by misery of all kinds and by sleepless nights, were red around the edges, and deeply sunken; the glance of those eyes, when the soul sent into them an expression of malignancy, would have frightened

both judges and criminals, or any others whom nothing usually affrights.

The mouth, toothless except for a few black fangs, was threatening; the saliva made a foam within it, which did not, however, pass the pale thin lips. Cerizet, a short man, less spare than shrunken, endeavored to remedy the defects of his person by his clothes, and although his garments were not those of opulence, he kept them in a condition of neatness which may even have increased his forlorn appearance. Everything about him seemed dubious; his age, his nose, his glance inspired doubt. It was impossible to know if he were thirty-eight or sixty; if his faded blue trousers, which fitted him well, were of a coming or a past fashion. His boots, worn at the heels, but scrupulously blacked, resoled for the third time, and very choice, originally, may have trodden in their day a ministerial carpet. The frock coat, soaked by many a down-pour, with its brandebourgs, the frogs of which were indiscreet enough to show their skeletons, testified by its cut to departed elegance. The satin stock-cravat fortunately concealed the shirt, but the tongue of the buckle behind the neck had frayed the satin, which was re-satined, that is, re-polished, by a species of oil distilled from the wig. In the days of its youth the waistcoat was not, of course, without freshness, but it was one of those waistcoats, bought for four francs, which come from the hooks of the ready-made clothing dealer. All these things were carefully brushed, and so was the shiny and misshapen hat. They harmonized with each other, even

to the black gloves which covered the hands of this subaltern Mephistopheles, whose whole anterior life may be summed up in a single phrase: —

He was an artist in evil, with whom, from the first, evil had succeeded; a man misled by these early successes to continue the plotting of infamous deeds within the lines of strict legality. Becoming the head of a printing-office by betraying his master [see "Lost Illusions"], he had afterwards been condemned to imprisonment as editor of a liberal newspaper. In the provinces, under the Restoration, he became the bete noire of the government, and was called "that unfortunate Cerizet" by some, as people spoke of "the unfortunate Chauvet" and "the heroic Mercier." He owed to this reputation of persecuted patriotism a place as sub-prefect in 1830. Six months later he was dismissed; but he insisted that he was judged without being heard; and he made so much talk about it that, under the ministry of Casimir Perier, he became the editor of an anti-republican newspaper in the pay of the government. He left that position to go into business, one phase of which was the most nefarious stock-company that ever fell into the hands of the correctional police. Cerizet proudly accepted the severe sentence he received; declaring it to be a revengeful plot on the part of the republicans, who, he said, would never forgive him for the hard blows he had dealt them in his journal. He spent the time of his imprisonment in a hospital. The government by this time were ashamed of a man whose almost infamous habits and shameful business

transactions, carried on in company with a former banker, named Claparon, led him at last into well-deserved public contempt.

Cerizet, thus fallen, step by step, to the lowest rung of the social ladder, had recourse to pity in order to obtain the place of copying clerk in Dutocq's office. In the depths of his wretchedness the man still dreamed of revenge, and, as he had nothing to lose, he employed all means to that end. Dutocq and himself were bound together in depravity. Cerizet was to Dutocq what the hound is the huntsman. Knowing himself the necessities of poverty and wretchedness, he set up that business of gutter usury called, in popular parlance, "the loan by the little week." He began this at first by help of Dutocq, who shared the profits; but, at the present moment this man of many legal crimes, now the banker of fishwives, the money-lender of costermongers, was the gnawing rodent of the whole faubourg.

"Well," said Cerizet as Dutocq opened his door, "Theodose has just come in; let us go to his room."

The advocate of the poor was fain to allow the two men to pass before him.

All three crossed a little room, the tiled floor of which, covered with a coating of red encaustic, shone in the light; thence into a little salon with crimson curtains and mahogany furniture, covered with red Utrecht velvet; the wall opposite the window being occupied by book-shelves containing a legal library. The chimney-piece was covered with vulgar ornaments, a clock with four columns in mahogany, and candelabra under glass shades.

The study, where the three men seated themselves before a soft-coal fire, was the study of a lawyer just beginning to practise. The furniture consisted of a desk, an armchair, little curtains of green silk at the windows, a green carpet, shelves for lawyer's boxes, and a couch, above which hung an ivory Christ on a velvet background. The bedroom, kitchen, and rest of the apartment looked out upon the courtyard.

"Well," said Cerizet, "how are things going? Are we getting on?"

"Yes," replied Theodose.

"You must admit," cried Dutocq, "that my idea was a famous one, in laying hold of that imbecile of a Thuillier?"

"Yes, but I'm not behindhand either," exclaimed Cerizet. "I have come now to show you a way to put the thumbscrews on the old maid and make her spin like a teetotum. We mustn't deceive ourselves; Mademoiselle Thuillier is the head and front of everything in this affair; if we get her on our side the town is won. Let us say little, but that little to the point, as becomes strong men with each other. Claparon, you know, is a fool; he'll be all his life what he always was, – a cat's-paw. Just now he is lending his name to a notary in Paris, who is concerned with a lot of contractors, and they are all – notary and masons – on the point of ruin. Claparon is going headlong into it. He never yet was bankrupt; but there's a first time for everything. He is hidden now in my hovel in the rue des Poules, where no one will ever find him. He is desperate, and he hasn't a penny. Now, among the five

or six houses built by these contractors, which have to be sold, there's a jewel of a house, built of freestone, in the neighborhood of the Madeleine, – a frontage laced like a melon, with beautiful carvings, – but not being finished, it will have to be sold for what it will bring; certainly not more than a hundred thousand francs. By spending twenty-five thousand francs upon it it could be let, undoubtedly, for ten thousand. Make Mademoiselle Thuillier the proprietor of that house and you'll win her love; she'll believe that you can put such chances in her way every year. There are two ways of getting hold of vain people: flatter their vanity, *or* threaten them; and there are also two ways of managing misers: fill their purse, or else attack it. Now, this stroke of business, while it does good to Mademoiselle Thuillier, does good to us as well, and it would be a pity not to profit by the chance."

"But why does the notary let it slip through his fingers?" asked Dutocq.

"The notary, my dear fellow! Why, he's the very one who saves us. Forced to sell his practice, and utterly ruined besides, he reserved for himself this crumb of the cake. Believing in the honesty of that idiot Claparon, he has asked him to find a dummy purchaser. We'll let him suppose that Mademoiselle Thuillier is a worthy soul who allows Claparon to use her name; they'll both be fooled, Claparon and the notary too. I owe this little trick to my friend Claparon, who left me to bear the whole weight of the trouble about his stock-company, in which we were tricked by Conture, and I hope you may never be in that man's skin!" he

added, infernal hatred flashing from his worn and withered eyes. "Now, I've said my say, gentlemen," he continued, sending out his voice through his nasal holes, and taking a dramatic attitude; for once, at a moment of extreme penury, he had gone upon the stage.

As he finished making his proposition some one rang at the outer door, and la Peyrade rose to go and open it. As soon as his back was turned, Cerizet said, hastily, to Dutocq: —

"Are you sure of him? I see a sort of air about him – And I'm a good judge of treachery."

"He is so completely in our power," said Dutocq, "that I don't trouble myself to watch; but, between ourselves, I didn't think him as strong as he proves to be. The fact is, we thought we were putting a barb between the legs of a man who didn't know how to ride, and the rogue is an old jockey!"

"Let him take care," growled Cerizet. "I can blow him down like a house of cards any day. As for you, papa Dutocq, you are able to see him at work all the time; watch him carefully. Besides, I'll feel his pulse by getting Claparon to propose to him to get rid of us; that will help us to judge him."

"Pretty good, that!" said Dutocq. "You are daring, anyhow."

"I've got my hand in, that's all," replied Cerizet.

These words were exchanged in a low voice during the time that it took Theodose to go to the outer door and return. Cerizet was looking at the books when the lawyer re-entered the room.

"It is Thuillier," said Theodose. "I thought he'd come; he is in

the salon. He mustn't see Cerizet's frock-coat; those frogs would frighten him."

"Pooh! you receive the poor in your office, don't you? That's in your role. Do you want any money?" added Cerizet, pulling a hundred francs out of his trousers' pocket. "There it is; it won't look amiss."

And he laid the pile on the chimney-piece.

"And now," said Dutocq, "we had better get out through the bedroom."

"Well, good-bye," said Theodose, opening a hidden door which communicated from the study to the bedroom. "Come in, Monsieur Thuillier," he called out to the beau of the Empire.

When he saw him safely in the study he went to let out his two associates through the bedroom and kitchen into the courtyard.

"In six months," said Cerizet, "you'll have married Celeste and got your foot into the stirrup. You are lucky, you are, not to have sat, like me, in the prisoners' dock. I've been there twice: once in 1825, for 'subversive articles' which I never wrote, and the second time for receiving the profits of a joint-stock company which had slipped through my fingers! Come, let's warm this thing up! Sac-a-papier! Dutocq and I are sorely in need of that twenty-five thousand francs. Good courage, old fellow!" he added, holding out his hand to Theodose, and making the grasp a test of faithfulness.

The Provencal gave Cerizet his right hand, pressing the other's hand warmly: —

"My good fellow," he said, "be very sure that in whatever position I may find myself I shall never forget that from which you have drawn me by putting me in the saddle here. I'm simply your bait; but you are giving me the best part of the catch, and I should be more infamous than a galley-slave who turns policeman if I didn't play fair."

As soon as the door was closed, Cerizet peeped through the key-hole, trying to catch sight of la Peyrade's face. But the Provencal had turned back to meet Thuillier, and his distrustful associate could not detect the expression of his countenance.

That expression was neither disgust nor annoyance, it was simply joy, appearing on a face that now seemed freed. Theodose saw the means of success approaching him, and he flattered himself that the day would come when he might get rid of his ignoble associates, to whom he owed everything. Poverty has unfathomable depths, especially in Paris, slimy bottoms, from which, when a drowned man rises to the surface of the water, he brings with him filth and impurity clinging to his clothes, or to his person. Cerizet, the once opulent friend and protector of Theodose, was the muddy mire still clinging to the Provencal, and the former manager of the joint-stock company saw very plainly that his tool wanted to brush himself on entering a sphere where decent clothing was a necessity.

"Well, my dear Theodose," began Thuillier, "we have hoped to see you every day this week, and every evening we find our hopes deceived. As this is our Sunday for a dinner, my sister and

my wife have sent me here to beg you to come to us."

"I have been so busy," said Theodose, "that I have not had two minutes to give to any one, not even to you, whom I count among my friends, and with whom I have wished to talk about – "

"What? have you really been thinking seriously over what you said to me?" cried Thuillier, interrupting him.

"If you had not come here now for a full understanding, I shouldn't respect you as I do," replied la Peyrade, smiling. "You have been a sub-director, and therefore you must have the remains of ambition – which is deucedly legitimate in your case! Come, now, between ourselves, when one sees a Minard, that gilded pot, displaying himself at the Tuileries, and complimenting the king, and a Popinot about to become a minister of State, and then look at you! a man trained to administrative work, a man with thirty years' experience, who has seen six governments, left to plant balsams in a little garden! Heavens and earth! – I am frank, my dear Thuillier, and I'll say, honestly, that I want to advance you, because you'll draw me after you. Well, here's my plan. We are soon to elect a member of the council-general from this arrondissement; and that member must be you. And," he added, dwelling on the word, "it *will* be you! After that, you will certainly be deputy from the arrondissement when the Chamber is re-elected, which must surely be before long. The votes that elect you to the municipal council will stand by you in the election for deputy, trust me for that."

"But how will you manage all this?" cried Thuillier,

fascinated.

"You shall know in good time; but you must let me conduct this long and difficult affair; if you commit the slightest indiscretion as to what is said, or planned, or agreed between us, I shall have to drop the whole matter, and good-bye to you!"

"Oh! you can rely on the absolute dumbness of a former sub-director; I've had secrets to keep."

"That's all very well; but these are secrets to keep from your wife and sister, and from Monsieur and Madame Colleville."

"Not a muscle of my face shall reveal them," said Thuillier, assuming a stolid air.

"Very good," continued Theodose. "I shall test you. In order to make yourself eligible, you must pay taxes on a certain amount of property, and you are not paying them."

"I beg your pardon; I'm all right for the municipal council at any rate; I pay two francs ninety-six centimes."

"Yes, but the tax on property necessary for election to the chamber is five hundred francs, and there is no time to lose in acquiring that property, because you must prove possession for one year."

"The devil!" cried Thuillier; "between now and a year hence to be taxed five hundred francs on property which – "

"Between now and the end of July, at the latest, you must pay that tax. Well, I feel enough interest in you to tell you the secret of an affair by which you might make from thirty to forty thousand francs a year, by employing a capital of one hundred and fifty

thousand at most. I know that in your family it is your sister who does your business; I am far from thinking that a mistake; she has, they tell me, excellent judgment; and you must let me begin by obtaining her good-will and friendship, and proposing this investment to her. And this is why: If Mademoiselle Thuillier is not induced to put faith in my plan, we shall certainly have difficulty with her. Besides, it won't do for YOU to propose to her that she should put the investment of her money in your name. The idea had better come from me. As to my means of getting you elected to the municipal council, they are these: Phellion controls one quarter of the arrondissement; he and Laudigeois have lived in it these thirty years, and they are listened to like oracles. I have a friend who controls another quarter; and the rector of Saint-Jacques, who is not without influence, thanks to his virtues, disposes of certain votes. Dutocq, in his close relation to the people, and also the justice of peace, will help me, above all, as I'm not acting for myself; and Colleville, as secretary of the mayor's office, can certainly manage to obtain another fourth of the votes."

"You are right!" cried Thuillier. "I'm elected!"

"Do you think so?" said la Peyrade, in a voice of the deepest sarcasm. "Very good! then go and ask your friend Colleville to help you, and see what he'll say. No triumph in election cases is ever brought about by the candidate himself, but by his friends. He should never ask anything himself for himself; he must be invited to accept, and appear to be without ambition."

"La Peyrade!" cried Thuillier, rising, and taking the hand of the young lawyer, "you are a very capable man."

"Not as capable as you, but I have my merits," said the Provencal, smiling.

"If we succeed how shall I ever repay you?" asked Thuillier, naively.

"Ah! that, indeed! I am afraid you will think me impertinent, but remember, there is a true feeling in my heart which offers some excuse for me; in fact, it has given me the spirit to undertake this affair. I love – and I take you for my confidant."

"But who is it?" said Thuillier.

"Your dear little Celeste," replied la Peyrade. "My love for her will be a pledge to you of my devotion. What would I not do for a *father-in-law*! This is pure selfishness; I shall be working for myself."

"Hush!" cried Thuillier.

"Eh, my friend!" said la Peyrade, catching Thuillier round the body; "if I hadn't Flavie on my side, and if I didn't know *all* should I venture to be talking to you thus? But please say nothing to Flavie about this; wait till she speaks to you. Listen to me; I'm of the metal that makes ministers; I do not seek to obtain Celeste until I deserve her. You shall not be asked to give her to me until the day when your election as a deputy of Paris is assured. In order to be deputy of Paris, we must get the better of Minard; and in order to crush Minard you must keep in your own hands all your means of influence; for that reason use Celeste as

a hope; we'll play them off, these people, against each other and fool them all – Madame Colleville and you and I will be persons of importance one of these days. Don't think me mercenary. I want Celeste without a 'dot,' with nothing more than her future expectations. To live in your family with you, to keep my wife in your midst, that is my desire. You see now that I have no hidden thoughts. As for you, my dear friend, six months after your election to the municipal council, you will have the cross of the Legion of honor, and when you are deputy you will be made an officer of it. As for your speeches in the Chamber – well! we'll write them together. Perhaps it would be desirable for you to write a book, – a serious book on matters half moral and philanthropic, half political; such, for instance, as charitable institutions considered from the highest stand-point; or reforms in the pawning system, the abuses of which are really frightful. Let us fasten some slight distinction to your name; it will help you, – especially in the arrondissement. Now, I say again, trust me, believe in me; do not think of taking me into your family until you have the ribbon in your buttonhole on the morrow of the day when you take your seat in the Chamber. I'll do more than that, however; I'll put you in the way of making forty thousand francs a year."

"For any one of those three things you shall have our Celeste," said Thuillier.

"Ah! what a pearl she is!" exclaimed la Peyrade, raising his eyes to heaven. "I have the weakness to pray to God for her every

day. She is charming; she is exactly like you – oh! nonsense; surely you needn't caution me! Dutocq told me all. Well, I'll be with you to-night. I must go to the Phellions' now, and begin to work our plan. You don't need me to caution you not to let it be known that you are thinking of me for Celeste; if you do, you'll cut off my arms and legs. Therefore, silence! even to Flavie. Wait till she speaks to you herself. Phellion shall to-night broach the matter of proposing you as candidate for the council."

"To-night?" said Thuillier.

"Yes, to-night," replied la Peyrade, "unless I don't find him at home now."

Thuillier departed, saying to himself: —

"That's a very superior man; we shall always understand each other. Faith! it might be hard to do better for Celeste. They will live with us, as in our own family, and that's a good deal! Yes, he's a fine fellow, a sound man."

To minds of Thuillier's calibre, a secondary consideration often assumes the importance of a principal reason. Theodose had behaved to him with charming bonhomie.

CHAPTER VII. THE WORTHY PHELLIONS

The house to which Theodose de la Peyrade now bent his steps had been the "hoc erat in votis" of Monsieur Phellion for twenty years; it was the house of the Phellions, just as much as Cerizet's frogged coat was the necessary complement of his personality.

This dwelling was stuck against the side of a large house, but only to the depth of one room (about twenty feet or so), and terminated at each end in a sort of pavilion with one window. Its chief charm was a garden, one hundred and eighty feet square, longer than the facade of the house by the width of a courtyard which opened on the street, and a little clump of lindens. Beyond the second pavilion, the courtyard had, between itself and the street, an iron railing, in the centre of which was a little gate opening in the middle.

This building, of rouge stone covered with stucco, and two storeys in height, had received a coat of yellow-wash; the blinds were painted green, and so were the shutters on the lower storey. The kitchen occupied the ground-floor of the pavilion on the courtyard, and the cook, a stout, strong girl, protected by two enormous dogs, performed the functions of portress. The facade, composed of five windows, and the two pavilions, which projected nine feet, were in the style Phellion. Above the door the master of the house had inserted a tablet of white

marble, on which, in letters of gold, were read the words, “Aurea mediocritas.” Above the sun-dial, affixed to one panel of the facade, he had also caused to be inscribed this sapient maxim: “Umbra mea vita, sic!”

The former window-sills had recently been superceded by sills of red Languedoc marble, found in a marble shop. At the bottom of the garden could be seen a colored statue, intended to lead casual observers to imagine that a nurse was carrying a child. The ground-floor of the house contained only the salon and the dining-room, separated from each other by the well of the staircase and the landing, which formed a sort of antechamber. At the end of the salon, in the other pavilion, was a little study occupied by Phellion.

On the first upper floor were the rooms of the father and mother and that of the young professor. Above were the chambers of the children and the servants; for Phellion, on consideration of his own age and that of his wife, had set up a male domestic, aged fifteen, his son having by that time entered upon his duties of tuition. To right, on entering the courtyard, were little offices where wood was stored, and where the former proprietor had lodged a porter. The Phellions were no doubt awaiting the marriage of their son to allow themselves that additional luxury.

This property, on which the Phellions had long had their eye, cost them eighteen thousand francs in 1831. The house was separated from the courtyard by a balustrade with a base of

freestone and a coping of tiles; this little wall, which was breast-high, was lined with a hedge of Bengal roses, in the middle of which opened a wooden gate opposite and leading to the large gates on the street. Those who know the cul-de-sac of the Feuillantines, will understand that the Phellion house, standing at right angles to the street, had a southern exposure, and was protected on the north by the immense wall of the adjoining house, against which the smaller structure was built. The cupola of the Pantheon and that of the Val-de-Grace looked from there like two giants, and so diminished the sky space that, walking in the garden, one felt cramped and oppressed. No place could be more silent than this blind street.

Such was the retreat of the great unknown citizen who was now tasting the sweets of repose, after discharging his duty to the nation in the ministry of finance, from which he had retired as registration clerk after a service of thirty-six years. In 1832 he had led his battalion of the National Guard to the attack on Saint-Merri, but his neighbors had previously seen tears in his eyes at the thought of being obliged to fire on misguided Frenchmen. The affair was already decided by the time his legion crossed the pont Notre-Dame at a quick step, after debouching by the flower-market. This noble hesitation won him the respect of his whole quarter, but he lost the decoration of the Legion of honor; his colonel told him in a loud voice that, under arms, there was no such thing as deliberation, – a saying of Louis-Philippe to the National Guard of Metz. Nevertheless, the bourgeois virtues of

Phellion, and the great respect in which he was held in his own quarter had kept him major of the battalion for eight years. He was now nearly sixty, and seeing the moment coming when he must lay off the sword and stock, he hoped that the king would deign to reward his services by granting him at last the Legion of honor.

Truth compels us to say, in spite of the stain this pettiness will put upon so fine a character, that Commander Phellion rose upon the tips of his toes at the receptions in the Tuileries, and did all that he could to put himself forward, even eyeing the citizen-king perpetually when he dined at his table. In short, he intrigued in a dumb sort of way; but had never yet obtained a look in return from the king of his choice. The worthy man had more than once thought, but was not yet decided, to beg Monsieur Minard to assist him in obtaining his secret desire.

Phellion, a man of passive obedience, was stoical in the matter of duty, and iron in all that touched his conscience. To complete this picture by a sketch of his person, we must add that at fifty-nine years of age Phellion had "thickened," to use a term of the bourgeois vocabulary. His face, of one monotonous tone and pitted with the small-pox, had grown to resemble a full moon; so that his lips, formerly large, now seemed of ordinary size. His eyes, much weakened, and protected by glasses, no longer showed the innocence of their light-blue orbs, which in former days had often excited a smile; his white hair now gave gravity to much that twelve years earlier had looked like silliness, and

lent itself to ridicule. Time, which does such damage to faces with refined and delicate features, only improves those which, in their youth, have been course and massive. This was the case with Phellion. He occupied the leisure of his old age in making an abridgment of the History of France; for Phellion was the author of several works adopted by the University.

When la Peyrade presented himself, the family were all together. Madame Barniol was just telling her mother about one of her babies, which was slightly indisposed. They were dressed in their Sunday clothes, and were sitting before the fireplace of the wainscoted salon on chairs bought at a bargain; and they all felt an emotion when Genevieve, the cook and portress, announced the personage of whom they were just then speaking in connection with Celeste, whom, we must here state, Felix Phellion loved, to the extent of going to mass to behold her. The learned mathematician had made that effort in the morning, and the family were joking him about it in a pleasant way, hoping in their hearts that Celeste and her parents might understand the treasure that was thus offered to them.

"Alas! the Thuilliers seem to me infatuated with a very dangerous man," said Madame Phellion. "He took Madame Colleville by the arm this morning after church, and they went together to the Luxembourg."

"There is something about that lawyer," remarked Felix Phellion, "that strikes me as sinister. He might be found to have committed some crime and I shouldn't be surprised."

"That's going too far," said old Phellion. "He is cousin-germain to Tartuffe, that immortal figure cast in bronze by our honest Moliere; for Moliere, my children, had honesty and patriotism for the basis of his genius."

It was at that instant that Genevieve came in to say, "There's a Monsieur de la Peyrade out there, who wants to see monsieur."

"To see me!" exclaimed Phellion. "Ask him to come in," he added, with that solemnity in little things which gave him even now a touch of absurdity, though it always impressed his family, which accepted him as king.

Phellion, his two sons, and his wife and daughter, rose and received the circular bow made by the lawyer.

"To what do we owe the honor of your visit, monsieur?" asked Phellion, stiffly.

"To your importance in this arrondissement, my dear Monsieur Phellion, and to public interests," replied Theodose.

"Then let us go into my study," said Phellion.

"No, no, my friend," said the rigid Madame Phellion, a small woman, flat as a flounder, who retained upon her features the grim severity with which she taught music in boarding-schools for young ladies; "we will leave you."

An upright Erard piano, placed between the two windows and opposite to the fireplace, showed the constant occupation of a proficient.

"Am I so unfortunate as to put you to flight?" said Theodose, smiling in a kindly way at the mother and daughter. "You have

a delightful retreat here," he continued. "You only lack a pretty daughter-in-law to pass the rest of your days in this 'aurea mediocritas,' the wish of the Latin poet, surrounded by family joys. Your antecedents, my dear Monsieur Phellion, ought surely to win you such rewards, for I am told that you are not only a patriot but a good citizen."

"Monsieur," said Phellion, embarrassed, "monsieur, I have only done my duty." At the word "daughter-in-law," uttered by Theodose, Madame Barniol, who resembled her mother as much as one drop of water is like another, looked at Madame Phellion and at Felix as if she would say, "Were we mistaken?"

The desire to talk this incident over carried all four personages into the garden, for, in March, 1840, the weather was spring-like, at least in Paris.

"Commander," said Theodose, as soon as he was alone with Phellion, who was always flattered by that title, "I have come to speak to you about the election – "

"Yes, true; we are about to nominate a municipal councillor," said Phellion, interrupting him.

"And it is apropos of that candidacy that I have come to disturb your Sunday joys; but perhaps in so doing we shall not go beyond the limits of the family circle."

It would be impossible for Phellion to be more Phellion than Theodose was Phellion at that moment.

"I shall not let you say another word," replied the commander, profiting by the pause made by Theodose, who watched for the

effect of his speech. “My choice is made.”

“We have had the same idea!” exclaimed Theodose; “men of the same character agree as well as men of the same mind.”

“In this case I do not believe in that phenomenon,” replied Phellion. “This arrondissement had for its representative in the municipal council the most virtuous of men, as he was the noblest of magistrates. I allude to the late Monsieur Popinot, the deceased judge of the Royal courts. When the question of replacing him came up, his nephew, the heir to his benevolence, did not reside in this quarter. He has since, however, purchased, and now occupies, the house where his uncle lived in the rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genevieve; he is the physician of the Ecole Polytechnique and that of our hospitals; he does honor to this quarter; for these reasons, and to pay homage in the person of the nephew to the memory of the uncle, we have decided to nominate Doctor Horace Bianchon, member of the Academy of Sciences, as you are aware, and one of the most distinguished young men in the illustrious faculty of Paris. A man is not great in our eyes solely because he is celebrated; to my mind the late Councillor Popinot was almost another Saint Vincent de Paul.”

“But a doctor is not an administrator,” replied Theodose; “and, besides, I have come to ask your vote for a man to whom your dearest interests require that you should sacrifice a predilection, which, after all, is quite unimportant to the public welfare.”

“Monsieur!” cried Phellion, rising and striking an attitude like that of Lafon in “Le Glorieux,” “Do you despise me sufficiently

to suppose that my personal interests could ever influence my political conscience? When a matter concerns the public welfare, I am a citizen – nothing more, and nothing less."

Theodose smiled to himself at the thought of the battle which was now to take place between the father and the citizen.

"Do not bind yourself to your present ideas, I entreat you," he said, "for this matter concerns the happiness of your dear Felix."

"What do you mean by those words?" asked Phellion, stopping short in the middle of the salon and posing, with his hand thrust through the bosom of his waistcoat from right to left, in the well-known attitude of Odilon Barrot.

"I have come in behalf of our mutual friend, the worthy and excellent Monsieur Thuillier, whose influence on the destiny of that beautiful Celeste Colleville must be well known to you. If, as I think, your son, whose merits are incontestable, and of whom both families may well be proud, if, I say, he is courting Celeste with a view to a marriage in which all expediencies may be combined, you cannot do more to promote that end than to obtain Thuillier's eternal gratitude by proposing your worthy friend to the suffrages of your fellow-citizens. As for me, though I have lately come into the quarter, I can, thanks to the influence I enjoy through certain legal benefits done to the poor, materially advance his interests. I might, perhaps, have put myself forward for this position; but serving the poor brings in but little money; and, besides, the modesty of my life is out of keeping with such distinctions. I have devoted myself, monsieur, to the service of

the weak, like the late Councillor Popinot, – a sublime man, as you justly remarked. If I had not already chosen a career which is in some sort monastic, and precludes all idea of marriage and public office, my taste, my second vocation, would lead me to the service of God, to the Church. I do not trumpet what I do, like the philanthropists; I do not write about it; I simply act; I am pledged to Christian charity. The ambition of our friend Thuillier becoming known to me, I have wished to contribute to the happiness of two young people who seem to me made for each other, by suggesting to you the means of winning the rather cold heart of Monsieur Thuillier."

Phellion was bewildered by this tirade, admirably delivered; he was dazzled, attracted; but he remained Phellion; he walked up to the lawyer and held out his hand, which la Peyrade took.

"Monsieur," said the commander, with emotion, "I have misjudged you. What you have done me the honor to confide to me will die *there*," laying his hand on his heart. "You are one of the men of whom we have too few, – men who console us for many evils inherent in our social state. Righteousness is seen so seldom that our too feeble natures distrust appearances. You have in me a friend, if you will allow me the honor of assuming that title. But you must learn to know me, monsieur. I should lose my own esteem if I nominated Thuillier. No, my son shall never own his happiness to an evil action on his father's part. I shall not change my candidate because my son's interests demand it. That is civic virtue, monsieur."

La Peyrade pulled out his handkerchief and rubbed it in his eye so that it drew a tear, as he said, holding out his hand to Phellion, and turning aside his head: —

"Ah! monsieur, how sublime a struggle between public and private duty! Had I come here only to see this sight, my visit would not have been wasted. You cannot do otherwise! In your place, I should do the same. You are that noblest thing that God has made – a righteous man! a citizen of the Jean-Jacques type! With many such citizens, oh France! my country! what mightest thou become! It is I, monsieur, who solicit, humbly, the honor to be your friend."

"What can be happening?" said Madame Phellion, watching the scene through the window. "Do see your father and that horrid man embracing each other."

Phellion and la Peyrade now came out and joined the family in the garden.

"My dear Felix," said the old man, pointing to la Peyrade, who was bowing to Madame Phellion, "be very grateful to that admirable young man; he will prove most useful to you."

The lawyer walked for about five minutes with Madame Barniol and Madame Phellion beneath the leafless lindens, and gave them (in consequence of the embarrassing circumstances created by Phellion's political obstinacy) a piece of advice, the effects of which were to bear fruit that evening, while its first result was to make both ladies admire his talents, his frankness, and his inappreciable good qualities. When the lawyer departed

the whole family conducted him to the street gate, and all eyes followed him until he had turned the corner of the rue du Faubourg-Saint-Jacques. Madame Phellion then took the arm of her husband to return to the salon, saying: —

"Hey! my friend! what does this mean? You, such a good father, how can you, from excessive delicacy, stand in the way of such a fine marriage for our Felix?"

"My dear," replied Phellion, "the great men of antiquity, Brutus and others, were never fathers when called upon to be citizens. The bourgeoisie has, even more than the aristocracy whose place it has been called upon to take, the obligations of the highest virtues. Monsieur de Saint-Hilaire did not think of his lost arm in presence of the dead Turenne. We must give proof of our worthiness; let us give it at every state of the social hierarchy. Shall I instruct my family in the highest civic principles only to ignore them myself at the moment for applying them? No, my dear; weep, if you must, to-day, but to-morrow you will respect me," he added, seeing tears in the eyes of his starched better half.

These noble words were said on the sill of the door, above which was written, "Aurea mediocritas."

"I ought to have put, 'et digna,'" added Phellion, pointing to the tablet, "but those two words would imply self-praise."

"Father," said Marie-Theodore Phellion, the future engineer of "ponts et chaussees," when the family were once more seated in the salon, "it seems to me that there is nothing dishonorable in changing one's determination about a choice which is of no real

consequence to public welfare."

"No consequence, my son!" cried Phellion. "Between ourselves I will say, and Felix shares my opinion, Monsieur Thuillier is absolutely without capacity; he knows nothing. Monsieur Horace Bianchon is an able man; he will obtain a thousand things for our arrondissement, and Thuillier will obtain none! Remember this, my son; to change a good determination for a bad one from motives of self-interest is one of those infamous actions which escape the control of men but are punished by God. I am, or I think I am, void of all blame before my conscience, and I owe it to you, my children, to leave my memory unstained among you. Nothing, therefore, can make me change my determination."

"Oh, my good father!" cried the little Barniol woman, flinging herself on a cushion at Phellion's knees, "don't ride your high horse! There are many fools and idiots in the municipal council, and France gets along all the same. That old Thuillier will adopt the opinions of those about him. Do reflect that Celeste will probably have five hundred thousand francs."

"She might have millions," said Phellion, "and I might see them there at my feet before I would propose Thuillier, when I owe to the memory of the best of men to nominate, if possible, Horace Bianchon, his nephew. From the heaven above us Popinot is contemplating and applauding me!" cried Phellion, with exaltation. "It is by such considerations as you suggest that France is being lowered, and the bourgeoisie are bringing

themselves into contempt."

"My father is right," said Felix, coming out of a deep reverie. "He deserves our respect and love; as he has throughout the whole course of his modest and honored life. I would not owe my happiness either to remorse in his noble soul, or to a low political bargain. I love Celeste as I love my own family; but, above all that, I place my father's honor, and since this question is a matter of conscience with him it must not be spoken of again."

Phellion, with his eyes full of tears, went up to his eldest son and took him in his arms, saying, "My son! my son!" in a choking voice.

"All that is nonsense," whispered Madame Phellion in Madame Barniol's ear. "Come and dress me; I shall make an end of this; I know your father; he has put his foot down now. To carry out the plan that pious young man, Theodose, suggested, I want your help; hold yourself ready to give it, my daughter."

At this moment, Genevieve came in and gave a letter to Monsieur Phellion.

"An invitation for dinner to-day, for Madame Phellion and Felix and myself, at the Thuilliers'," he said.

The magnificent and surprising idea of Thuillier's municipal advancement, put forth by the "advocate of the poor" was not less upsetting in the Thuillier household than it was in the Phellion salon. Jerome Thuillier, without actually confiding anything to his sister, for he made it a point of honor to obey his Mephistopheles, had rushed to her in great excitement to say: —

"My dearest girl" (he always touched her heart with those caressing words), "we shall have some big-wigs at dinner to-day. I'm going to ask the Minards; therefore take pains about your dinner. I have written to Monsieur and Madame Phellion; it is rather late; but there's no need of ceremony with them. As for the Minards, I must throw a little dust in their eyes; I have a particular need of them."

"Four Minards, three Phellions, four Collevilles, and ourselves; that makes thirteen – "

"La Peyrade, fourteen; and it is worth while to invite Dutocq; he may be useful to us. I'll go up and see him."

"What are you scheming?" cried his sister. "Fifteen to dinner! There's forty francs, at the very least, waltzing off."

"You won't regret them, my dearest. I want you to be particularly agreeable to our young friend, la Peyrade. There's a friend, indeed! you'll soon have proofs of that! If you love me, cosset him well."

So saying, he departed, leaving Brigitte bewildered.

"Proofs, indeed! yes, I'll look out for proofs," she said. "I'm not to be caught with fine words, not I! He is an amiable fellow; but before I take him into my heart I shall study him a little closer."

After inviting Dutocq, Thuillier, having bedizened himself, went to the hotel Minard, rue des Macons-Sorbonne, to capture the stout Zelie, and gloss over the shortness of the invitation.

Minard had purchased one of those large and sumptuous

habitations which the old religious orders built about the Sorbonne, and as Thuillier mounted the broad stone steps with an iron balustrade, that proved how arts of the second class flourished under Louis XIII., he envied both the mansion and its occupant, – the mayor.

This vast building, standing between a courtyard and garden, is noticeable as a specimen of the style, both noble and elegant, of the reign of Louis XIII., coming singularly, as it did, between the bad taste of the expiring renaissance and the heavy grandeur of Louis XIV., at its dawn. This transition period is shown in many public buildings. The massive scroll-work of several facades – that of the Sorbonne, for instance, – and columns rectified according to the rules of Grecian art, were beginning to appear in this architecture.

A grocer, a lucky adulterator, now took the place of the former ecclesiastical governor of an institution called in former times L'Economat; an establishment connected with the general agency of the old French clergy, and founded by the long-sighted genius of Richelieu. Thuillier's name opened for him the doors of the salon, where sat enthroned in velvet and gold, amid the most magnificent "Chineseries," the poor woman who weighed with all her avoirdupois on the hearts and minds of princes and princesses at the "popular balls" of the palace.

"Isn't she a good subject for 'La Caricature'?" said a so-called lady of the bedchamber to a duchess, who could hardly help laughing at the aspect of Zelie, glittering with diamonds, red as

a poppy, squeezed into a gold brocade, and rolling along like the casts of her former shop.

"Will you pardon me, fair lady," began Thuillier, twisting his body, and pausing in pose number two of his imperial repertory, "for having allowed this invitation to remain in my desk, thinking, all the while, that it was sent? It is for to-day, but perhaps I am too late?"

Zelie examined her husband's face as he approached them to receive Thuillier; then she said: —

"We intended to drive into the country and dine at some chance restaurant; but we'll give up that idea and all the more readily because, in my opinion, it is getting devilishly vulgar to drive out of Paris on Sundays."

"We will have a little dance to the piano for the young people, if enough come, as I hope they will. I have sent a line to Phellion, whose wife is intimate with Madame Pron, the successor – "

"Successor*ess*," interrupted Madame Minard.

"No," said Thuillier, "it ought to be success'ress; just as we say may'ress, dropping the O, you know."

"Is it full dress?" asked Madame Minard.

"Heavens! no," replied Thuillier; "you would get me finely scolded by my sister. No, it is only a family party. Under the Empire, madame, we all devoted ourselves to dancing. At that great epoch of our national life they thought as much of a fine dancer as they did of a good soldier. Nowadays the country is so matter-of-fact."

"Well, we won't talk politics," said the mayor, smiling. "The King is grand; he is very able. I have a deep admiration for my own time, and for the institutions which we have given to ourselves. The King, you may be sure, knows very well what he is doing by the development of industries. He is struggling hand to hand against England; and we are doing him more harm during this fruitful peace than all the wars of the Empire would have done."

"What a deputy Minard would make!" cried Zelie, naively. "He practises speechifying at home. You'll help us to get him elected, won't you, Thuillier?"

"We won't talk politics now," replied Thuillier. "Come at five."

"Will that little Vinet be there?" asked Minard; "he comes, no doubt, for Celeste."

"Then he may go into mourning," replied Thuillier. "Brigitte won't hear of him."

Zelie and Minard exchanged a smile of satisfaction.

"To think that we must hob-nob with such common people, all for the sake of our son!" cried Zelie, when Thuillier was safely down the staircase, to which the mayor had accompanied him.

"Ha! he thinks to be deputy!" thought Thuillier, as he walked away. "These grocers! nothing satisfies them. Heavens! what would Napoleon say if he could see the government in the hands of such people! I'm a trained administrator, at any rate. What a competitor, to be sure! I wonder what la Peyrade will say?"

The ambitious ex-beau now went to invite the whole Laudigeois family for the evening, after which he went to the Collevilles', to make sure that Celeste should wear a becoming gown. He found Flavie rather pensive. She hesitated about coming, but Thuillier overcame her indecision.

"My old and ever young friend," he said, taking her round the waist, for she was alone in her little salon, "I won't have any secret from you. A great affair is in the wind for me. I can't tell you more than that, but I can ask you to be particularly charming to a certain young man – "

"Who is it?"

"La Peyrade."

"Why, Charles?"

"He holds my future in his hands. Besides, he's a man of genius. I know what that is. He's got this sort of thing," – and Thuillier made the gesture of a dentist pulling out a back tooth. "We must bind him to us, Flavie. But, above all, don't let him see his power. As for me, I shall just give and take with him."

"Do you want me to be coquettish?"

"Not too much so, my angel," replied Thuillier, with a foppish air.

And he departed, not observing the stupor which overcame Flavie.

"That young man is a power," she said to herself. "Well, we shall see!"

For these reasons she dressed her hair with marabouts, put

on her prettiest gown of gray and pink, which allowed her fine shoulders to be seen beneath a pelerine of black lace, and took care to keep Celeste in a little silk frock made with a yoke and a large plaited collarette, telling her to dress her hair plainly, a la Berthe.

CHAPTER VIII. AD MAJOREM THEODOSIS GLORIAM

At half-past four o'clock Theodose was at his post. He had put on his vacant, half-servile manner and soft voice, and he drew Thuillier at once into the garden.

"My friend," he said, "I don't doubt your triumph, but I feel the necessity of again warning you to be absolutely silent. If you are questioned about anything, especially about Celeste, make evasive answers which will keep your questioners in suspense. You must have learned how to do that in a government office."

"I understand!" said Thuillier. "But what certainty have you?"

"You'll see what a fine dessert I have prepared for you. But please be modest. There come the Minards; let me pipe to them. Bring them out here, and then disappear yourself."

After the first salutations, la Peyrade was careful to keep close to the mayor, and presently at an opportune moment he drew him aside to say: —

"Monsieur le maire, a man of your political importance doesn't come to bore himself in a house of this kind without an object. I don't want to fathom your motives – which, indeed, I have no right to do – and my part in this world is certainly not to mingle with earthly powers; but please pardon my apparent presumption, and deign to listen to a piece of advice which I shall venture to give you. If I do you a service to-day you are in a

position to return it to me to-morrow; therefore, in case I should be so fortunate as to do you a good turn, I am really only obeying the law of self-interest. Our friend Thuillier is in despair at being a nobody; he has taken it into his head that he wants to become a personage in this arrondissement – "

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Minard.

"Oh! nothing very exalted; he wants to be elected to the municipal council. Now, I know that Phellion, seeing the influence such a service would have on his family interests, intends to propose your poor friend as candidate. Well, perhaps you might think it wise, in your own interests, to be beforehand with him. Thuillier's nomination could only be favorable for you – I mean agreeable; and he'll fill his place in the council very well; there are some there who are not as strong as he. Besides, owing to his place to your support, he will see with your eyes; he already looks to you as one of the lights of the town."

"My dear fellow, I thank you very much," replied Minard. "You are doing me a service I cannot sufficiently acknowledge, and which proves to me – "

"That I don't like those Phellions," said la Peyrade, taking advantage of a slight hesitation on the part of the mayor, who feared to express an idea in which the lawyer might see contempt. "I hate people who make capital out of their honesty and coin money from fine sentiments."

"You know them well," said Minard; "they are sycophants. That man's whole life for the last ten years is explained by this bit

of red ribbon," added the mayor, pointing to his own buttonhole.

"Take care!" said the lawyer, "his son is in love with Celeste, and he's fairly in the heart of the family."

"Yes, but my son has twelve thousand a year in his own right."

"Oh!" said Theodose, with a start, "Mademoiselle Brigitte was saying the other day that she wanted at least as much as that in Celeste's suitor. Moreover, six months hence you'll probably hear that Thuillier has a property worth forty thousand francs a year."

"The devil! well, I thought as much. Yes, certainly, he shall be made a member of the municipal council."

"In any case, don't say anything about me to him," said the advocate of the poor, who now hastened away to speak to Madame Phellion. "Well, my fair lady," he said, when he reached her, "have you succeeded?"

"I waited till four o'clock, and then that worthy and excellent man would not let me finish what I had to say. He is much to busy to accept such an office, and he sent a letter which Monsieur Phellion has read, saying that he, Doctor Bianchon, thanked him for his good intentions, and assured him that his own candidate was Monsieur Thuillier. He said that he should use all his influence in his favor, and begged my husband to do the same."

"And what did your excellent husband say?"

"'I have done my duty,' he said. 'I have not been false to my conscience, and now I am all for Thuillier.'"

"Well, then, the thing is settled," said la Peyrade. "Ignore my

visit, and take all the credit of the idea to yourselves."

Then he went to Madame Colleville, composing himself in the attitude and manner of the deepest respect.

"Madame," he said, "have the goodness to send out to me here that kindly papa Colleville. A surprise is to be given to Monsieur Thuillier, and I want Monsieur Colleville to be in the secret."

While la Peyrade played the part of man of the world with Colleville, and allowed himself various witty sarcasms when explaining to him Thuillier's candidacy, telling him he ought to support it, if only to exhibit his incapacity, Flavie was listening in the salon to the following conversation, which bewildered her for the moment and made her ears ring.

"I should like to know what Monsieur Colleville and Monsieur de la Peyrade can be saying to each other to make them laugh like that," said Madame Thuillier, foolishly, looking out of the window.

"A lot of improper things, as men always do when they talk together," replied Mademoiselle Thuillier, who often attacked men with the sort of instinct natural to old maids.

"No, they are incapable of that," said Phellion, gravely. "Monsieur de la Peyrade is one of the most virtuous young men I have ever met. People know what I think of Felix; well, I put the two on the same line; indeed, I wish my son had a little more of Monsieur de la Peyrade's beautiful piety."

"You are right; he is a man of great merit, who is sure to succeed," said Minard. "As for me, my suffrages – for I really

ought not to say protection – are his."

"He pays more for oil than for bread," said Dutocq. "I know that."

"His mother, if he has the happiness to still possess her, must be proud of him," remarked Madame Thuillier, sententiously.

"He is a real treasure for us," said Thuillier. "If you only knew how modest he is! He doesn't do himself justice."

"I can answer for one thing," added Dutocq; "no young man ever maintained a nobler attitude in poverty; he triumphed over it; but he suffered – it is easy to see that."

"Poor young man!" cried Zelie. "Such things make my heart ache!"

"Any one could safely trust both secrets and fortune to him," said Thuillier; "and in these days that is the finest thing that can be said of a man."

"It is Colleville who is making him laugh," cried Dutocq.

Just then Colleville and la Peyrade returned from the garden the very best friends in the world.

"Messieurs," said Brigitte, "the soup and the King must never be kept waiting; give your hand to the ladies."

Five minutes after this little pleasantry (issuing from the lodge of her father the porter) Brigitte had the satisfaction of seeing her table surrounded by the principal personages of this drama; the rest, with the one exception of the odious Cerizet, arrived later.

The portrait of the former maker of canvas money-bags would be incomplete if we omitted to give a description of one of her

best dinners. The physiognomy of the bourgeois cook of 1840 is, moreover, one of those details essentially necessary to a history of manners and customs, and clever housewives may find some lessons in it. A woman doesn't make empty bags for twenty years without looking out for the means to fill a few of them. Now Brigitte had one peculiar characteristic. She united the economy to which she owed her fortune with a full understanding of necessary expenses. Her relative prodigality, when it concerned her brother or Celeste, was the antipodes of avarice. In fact, she often bemoaned herself that she couldn't be miserly. At her last dinner she had related how, after struggling ten minute and enduring martyrdom, she had ended by giving ten francs to a poor workwoman whom she knew, positively, had been without food for two days.

"Nature," she said naively, "is stronger than reason."

The soup was a rather pale bouillon; for, even on an occasion like this, the cook had been enjoined to make a great deal of bouillon out of the beef supplied. Then, as the said beef was to feed the family on the next day and the day after that, the less juice it expended in the bouillon, the more substantial were the subsequent dinners. The beef, little cooked, was always taken away at the following speech from Brigitte, uttered as soon as Thuillier put his knife into it: —

"I think it is rather tough; send it away, Thuillier, nobody will eat it; we have other things."

The soup was, in fact, flanked by four viands mounted on

old hot-water chafing-dishes, with the plating worn off. At this particular dinner (afterwards called that of the candidacy) the first course consisted of a pair of ducks with olives, opposite to which was a large pie with forcemeat balls, while a dish of eels “a la tartare” corresponded in like manner with a fricandeau on chicory. The second course had for its central dish a most dignified goose stuffed with chestnuts, a salad of vegetables garnished with rounds of beetroot opposite to custards in cups, while lower down a dish of turnips “au sucre” faced a timbale of macaroni. This gala dinner of the concierge type cost, at the utmost, twenty francs, and the remains of the feast provided the household for a couple of days; nevertheless, Brigitte would say: —

“Pest! when one has to have company how the money goes! It is fearful!”

The table was lighted by two hideous candlesticks of plated silver with four branches each, in which shone eight of those thrifty wax-candles that go by the name of Aurora. The linen was dazzling in whiteness, and the silver, with beaded edges, was the fruit, evidently, of some purchase made during the Revolution by Thuillier’s father. Thus the fare and the service were in keeping with the house, the dining-room, and the Thuilliers themselves, who could never, under any circumstances, get themselves above this style of living. The Minards, Collevilles, and la Peyrade exchanged now and then a smile which betrayed their mutually satirical but repressed thoughts. La Peyrade, seated beside

Flavie, whispered in her ear: —

"You must admit that they ought to be taught how to live. But those Minards are no better in their way. What cupidity! they've come here solely after Celeste. Your daughter will be lost to you if you let them have her. These parvenus have all the vices of the great lords of other days without their elegance. Minard's son, who has twelve thousand francs a year of his own, could very well find a wife elsewhere, instead of pushing his speculating rake in here. What fun it would be to play upon those people as one would on a bass-viol or a clarionet!"

While the dishes of the second course were being removed, Minard, afraid that Phellion would precede him, said to Thuillier with a grave air: —

"My dear Thuillier, in accepting your dinner, I did so for the purpose of making an important communication, which does you so much honor that all here present ought to be made participants in it."

Thuillier turned pale.

"Have you obtained the cross for me?" he cried, on receiving a glance from Theodose, and wishing to prove that he was not without craft.

"You will doubtless receive it ere long," replied the mayor. "But the matter now relates to something better than that. The cross is a favor due to the good opinion of a minister, whereas the present question concerns an election due to the consent of your fellow citizens. In a word, a sufficiently large number of

electors in your arrondissement have cast their eyes upon you, and wish to honor you with their confidence by making you the representative of this arrondissement in the municipal council of Paris; which, as everybody knows, is the Council-general of the Seine."

"Bravo!" cried Dutocq.

Phellion rose.

"Monsieur le maire has forestalled me," he said in an agitated voice, "but it is so flattering for our friend to be the object of eagerness on the part of all good citizens, and to obtain the public vote of high and low, that I cannot complain of being obliged to come second only; therefore, all honor to the initiatory authority!" (Here he bowed respectfully to Minard.) "Yes, Monsieur Thuillier, many electors think of giving you their votes in that portion of the arrondissement where I keep my humble penates; and you have the special advantage of being suggested to their minds by a distinguished man." (Sensation.) "By a man in whose person we desired to honor one of the most virtuous inhabitants of the arrondissement, who for twenty years, I may say, was the father of it. I allude to the late Monsieur Popinot, counsellor, during his lifetime, to the Royal court, and our delegate in the municipal council of Paris. But his nephew, of whom I speak, Doctor Bianchon, one of our glories, has, in view of his absorbing duties, declined the responsibility with which we sought to invest him. While thanking us for our compliment he has – take note of this – indicated for our suffrages the candidate

of Monsieur le maire as being, in his opinion, capable, owing to the position he formerly occupied, of exercising the magisterial functions of the aedileship."

And Phellion sat down amid approving murmurs.

"Thuillier, you can count on me, your old friend," said Colleville.

At this moment the guests were sincerely touched by the sight presented of old Mademoiselle Brigitte and Madame Thuillier. Brigitte, pale as though she were fainting, was letting the slow tears run, unheeded, down her cheeks, tears of deepest joy; while Madame Thuillier sat, as if struck by lightning, with her eyes fixed. Suddenly the old maid darted into the kitchen, crying out to Josephine the cook: —

"Come into the cellar my girl, we must get out the wine behind the wood!"

"My friends," said Thuillier, in a shaking voice, "this is the finest moment of my life, finer than even the day of my election, should I consent to allow myself to be presented to the suffrages of my fellow-citizens" ("You must! you must!"); "for I feel myself much worn down by thirty years of public service, and, as you may well believe, a man of honor has need to consult his strength and his capacities before he takes upon himself the functions of the aedileship."

"I expected nothing less of you, Monsieur Thuillier," cried Phellion. "Pardon me; this is the first time in my life that I have ever interrupted a superior; but there are circumstances – "

"Accept! accept!" cried Zelie. "Bless my soul! what we want are men like you to govern us."

"Resign yourself, my chief!" cried Dutocq, and, "Long live the future municipal councillor! but we haven't anything to drink – "

"Well, the thing is settled," said Minard; "you are to be our candidate."

"You think too much of me," replied Thuillier.

"Come, come!" cried Colleville. "A man who has done thirty years in the galleys of the ministry of finance is a treasure to the town."

"You are much too modest," said the younger Minard; "your capacity is well known to us; it remains a tradition at the ministry of finance."

"As you all insist – " began Thuillier.

"The King will be pleased with our choice; I can assure you of that," said Minard, pompously.

"Gentlemen," said la Peyrade, "will you permit a recent dweller in the faubourg Saint-Jacques to make one little remark, which is not without importance?"

The consciousness that everybody had of the sterling merits of the advocate of the poor produced the deepest silence.

"The influence of Monsieur le maire of an adjoining arrondissement, which is immense in ours where he has left such excellent memories; that of Monsieur Phellion, the oracle – yes, let the truth be spoken," he exclaimed, noticing a gesture made by Phellion – "the *oracle* of his battalion; the influence,

no less powerful, which Monsieur Colleville owes to the frank heartiness of his manner, and to his urbanity; that of Monsieur Dutocq, the clerk of the justice court, which will not be less efficacious, I am sure; and the poor efforts which I can offer in my humble sphere of activity, – are pledges of success, but they are not success itself. To obtain a rapid triumph we should pledge ourselves, now and here, to keep the deepest secrecy on the manifestation of sentiments which has just taken place. Otherwise, we should excite, without knowing or willing it, envy and all the other secondary passions, which would create for us later various obstacles to overcome. The political meaning of the new social organization, its very basis, its token, and the guarantee for its continuance, are in a certain sharing of the governing power with the middle classes, classes who are the true strength of modern societies, the centre of morality, of all good sentiments and intelligent work. But we cannot conceal from ourselves that the principle of election, extended now to almost every function, has brought the interests of ambition, and the passion for being *something*, excuse the word, into social depths where they ought never to have penetrated. Some see good in this; others see evil; it is not my place to judge between them in presence of minds before whose eminence I bow. I content myself by simply suggesting this question in order to show the dangers which the banner of our friend must meet. See for yourselves! the decease of our late honorable representative in the municipal council dates back scarcely one week, and already

the arrondissement is being canvassed by inferior ambitions. Such men put themselves forward to be seen at any price. The writ of convocation will, probably, not take effect for a month to come. Between now and then, imagine the intrigues! I entreat you not to expose our friend Thuillier to the blows of his competitors; let us not deliver him over to public discussion, that modern harpy which is but the trumpet of envy and calumny, the pretext seized by malevolence to belittle all that is great, soil all that is immaculate and dishonor whatever is sacred. Let us, rather, do as the Third Party is now doing in the Chamber, – keep silence and vote!"

"He speaks well," said Phellion to his neighbor Dutocq.

"And how strong the statement is!"

Envy had turned Minard and his son green and yellow.

"That is well said and very true," remarked Minard.

"Unanimously adopted!" cried Colleville. "Messieurs, we are men of honor; it suffices to understand each other on this point."

"Whoso desires the end accepts the means," said Phellion, emphatically.

At this moment, Mademoiselle Thuillier reappeared, followed by her two servants; the key of the cellar was hanging from her belt, and three bottles of champagne, three of hermitage, and one bottle of malaga were placed upon the table. She herself was carrying, with almost respectful care, a smaller bottle, like a fairy Carabosse, which she placed before her. In the midst of the hilarity caused by this abundance of excellent things – a

fruit of gratitude, which the poor spinster in the delirium of her joy poured out with a profusion which put to shame the sparing hospitality of her usual fortnightly dinners – numerous dessert dishes made their appearance: mounds of almonds, raisins, figs, and nuts (popularly known as the "four beggars"), pyramids of oranges, confections, crystallized fruits, brought from the hidden depths of her cupboards, which would never have figured on the table-cloth had it not been for the "candidacy."

"Celeste, they will bring you a bottle of brandy which my father obtained in 1802; make an orange-salad!" cried Brigitte to her sister-in-law. "Monsieur Phellion, open the champagne; that bottle is for you three. Monsieur Dutocq, take this one. Monsieur Colleville, you know how to pop corks!"

The two maids distributed champagne glasses, also claret glasses, and wine glasses. Josephine also brought three more bottles of Bordeaux.

"The year of the comet!" cried Thuillier, laughing, "Messieurs, you have turned my sister's head."

"And this evening you shall have punch and cakes," she said. "I have sent to the chemists for some tea. Heavens! if I had only known the affair concerned an election," she cried, looking at her sister-in-law, "I'd have served the turkey."

A general laugh welcomed this speech.

"We have a goose!" said Minard junior.

"The carts are unloading!" cried Madame Thuillier, as "marrons glaces" and "meringues" were placed upon the table.

Mademoiselle Thuillier's face was blazing. She was really superb to behold. Never did sisterly love assume such a frenzied expression.

"To those who know her, it is really touching," remarked Madame Colleville.

The glasses were filled. The guests all looked at one another, evidently expecting a toast, whereupon la Peyrade said: —

"Messieurs, let us drink to something sublime."

Everybody looked curious.

"To Mademoiselle Brigitte!"

They all rose, clinked glasses, and cried with one voice, "Mademoiselle Brigitte!" so much enthusiasm did the exhibition of a true feeling excite.

"Messieurs," said Phellion, reading from a paper written in pencil, "To work and its splendors, in the person of our former comrade, now become one of the mayors of Paris, – to Monsieur Minard and his wife!"

After five minutes' general conversation Thuillier rose and said: —

"Messieurs, To the King and the royal family! I add nothing; the toast says all."

"To the election of my brother!" said Mademoiselle Thuillier a moment later.

"Now I'll make you laugh," whispered la Peyrade in Flavie's ear.

And he rose.

"To Woman!" he said; "that enchanting sex to whom we owe our happiness, – not to speak of our mothers, our sisters, and our wives!"

This toast excited general hilarity, and Colleville, already somewhat gay, exclaimed: —

"Rascal! you have stolen my speech!"

The mayor then rose; profound silence reigned.

"Messieurs, our institutions! from which come the strength and grandeur of dynastic France!"

The bottles disappeared amid a chorus of admiration as to the marvellous goodness and delicacy of their contents.

Celeste Colleville here said timidly: —

"Mamma, will you permit me to give a toast?"

The good girl had noticed the dull, bewildered look of her godmother, neglected and forgotten, – she, the mistress of that house, wearing almost the expression of a dog that is doubtful which master to obey, looking from the face of her terrible sister-in-law to that of Thuillier, consulting each countenance, and oblivious of herself; but joy on the face of that poor helot, accustomed to be nothing, to repress her ideas, her feelings, had the effect of a pale wintry sun behind a mist; it barely lighted her faded, flabby flesh. The gauze cap trimmed with dingy flowers, the hair ill-dressed, the gloomy brown gown, with no ornament but a thick gold chain – all, combined with the expression of her countenance, stimulated the affection of the young Celeste, who – alone in the world – knew the value of that woman condemned

to silence but aware of all about her, suffering from all yet consoling herself in God and in the girl who now was watching her.

"Yes, let the dear child give us her little toast," said la Peyrade to Madame Colleville.

"Go on, my daughter," cried Colleville; "here's the hermitage still to be drunk – and it's hoary with age," he added.

"To my kind godmother!" said the girl, lowering her glass respectfully before Madame Thuillier, and holding it towards her.

The poor woman, startled, looked through a veil of tears first at her husband, and then at Brigitte; but her position in the family was so well known, and the homage paid by innocence to weakness had something so beautiful about it, that the emotion was general; the men all rose and bowed to Madame Thuillier.

"Ah! Celeste, I would I had a kingdom to lay at your feet," murmured Felix Phellion.

The worthy Phellion wiped away a tear. Dutocq himself was moved.

"Oh! the charming child!" cried Mademoiselle Thuillier, rising, and going round to kiss her sister-in-law.

"My turn now!" said Colleville, posing like an athlete. "Now listen: To friendship! Empty your glasses; refill your glasses. Good! To the fine arts, – the flower of social life! Empty your glasses; refill your glasses. To another such festival on the day after election!"

"What is that little bottle you have there?" said Dutocq to

Mademoiselle Thuillier.

"That," she said, "is one of my three bottles of Madame Amphoux' liqueur; the second is for the day of Celeste's marriage; the third for the day on which her first child is baptized."

"My sister is losing her head," remarked Thuillier to Colleville.

The dinner ended with a toast, offered by Thuillier, but suggested to him by Theodose at the moment when the malaga sparkled in the little glasses like so many rubies.

"Colleville, messieurs, has drunk to *friendship*. I now drink, in this most generous wine, To my friends!"

An hurrah, full of heartiness, greeted that fine sentiment, but Dutocq remarked aside to Theodose: —

"It is a shame to pour such wine down the throats of such people."

"Ah! if we could only make such wine as that!" cried Zelie, making her glass ring by the way in which she sucked down the Spanish liquid. "What fortunes we could get!"

Zelie had now reached her highest point of incandescence, and was really alarming.

"Yes," replied Minard, "but ours is made."

"Don't you think, sister," said Brigitte to Madame Thuillier, "that we had better take coffee in the salon?"

Madame Thuillier obediently assumed the air of mistress of the house, and rose.

"Ah! you are a great wizard," said Flavie Colleville, accepting la Peyrade's arm to return to the salon.

"And yet I care only to bewitch you," he answered. "I think you more enchanting than ever this evening."

"Thuillier," she said, to evade the subject, "Thuillier made to think himself a political character! oh! oh!"

"But, my dear Flavie, half the absurdities of life are the result of such conspiracies; and men are not alone in these deceptions. In how many families one sees the husband, children, and friends persuading a silly mother that she is a woman of sense, or an old woman of fifty that she is young and beautiful. Hence, inconceivable contrarieties for those who go about the world with their eyes shut. One man owes his ill-savored conceit to the flattery of a mistress; another owes his versifying vanity to those who are paid to call him a great poet. Every family has its great man; and the result is, as we see it in the Chamber, general obscurity of the lights of France. Well, men of real mind are laughing to themselves about it, that's all. You are the mind and the beauty of this little circle of the petty bourgeoisie; it is this superiority which led me in the first instance to worship you. I have since longed to drag you out of it; for I love you sincerely – more in friendship than in love; though a great deal of love is gliding into it," he added, pressing her to his heart under cover of the recess of a window to which he had taken her.

"Madame Phellion will play the piano," cried Colleville. "We must all dance to-night – bottles and Brigitte's francs and all the

little girls! I'll go and fetch my clarionet."

He gave his empty coffee-cup to his wife, smiling to see her so friendly with la Peyrade.

"What have you said and done to my husband?" asked Flavie, when Colleville had left them.

"Must I tell you all our secrets?"

"Ah! you don't love me," she replied, looking at him with the coquettish slyness of a woman who is not quite decided in her mind.

"Well, since you tell me yours," he said, letting himself go to the lively impulse of Provencal gaiety, always so charming and apparently so natural, "I will not conceal from you an anxiety in my heart."

He took her back to the same window and said, smiling: —

"Colleville, poor man, has seen in me the artist repressed by all these bourgeois; silent before them because I feel misjudged, misunderstood, and repelled by them. He has felt the heat of the sacred fire that consumes me. Yes I am," he continued, in a tone of conviction, "an artist in words after the manner of Berryer; I could make juries weep, by weeping myself, for I'm as nervous as a woman. Your husband, who detests the bourgeoisie, began to tease me about them. At first we laughed; then, in becoming serious, he found out that I was as strong as he. I told him of the plan concocted to make *something* of Thuillier, and I showed him all the good he could get himself out of a political puppet. 'If it were only,' I said to him, 'to make yourself Monsieur *de*

Colleville, and to put your charming wife where I should like to see her, as the wife of a receiver-general, or deputy. To make yourself all that you and she ought to be, you have only to go and live a few years in the Upper or Lower Alps, in some hole of a town where everybody will like you, and your wife will seduce everybody; and this,' I added, 'you cannot fail to obtain, especially if you give your dear Celeste to some man who can influence the Chamber.' Good reasons, stated in jest, have the merit of penetrating deeper into some minds than if they were given soberly. So Colleville and I became the best friends in the world. Didn't you hear him say to me at table, 'Rascal! you have stolen my speech'? To-night we shall be theeing and thouing each other. I intend to have a choice little supper-party soon, where artists, tied to the proprieties at home, always compromise themselves. I'll invite him, and that will make us as solidly good friends as he is with Thuillier. There, my dear adorned one, is what a profound sentiment gives a man the courage to produce. Colleville must adopt me; so that I may visit your house by his invitation. But what couldn't you make me do? lick lepers, swallow live toads, seduce Brigitte – yes, if you say so, I'll impale my own heart on that great picket-rail to please you."

"You frightened me this morning," she said.

"But this evening you are reassured. Yes," he added, "no harm will ever happen to you through me."

"You are, I must acknowledge, a most extraordinary man."

"Why, no! the smallest as well as the greatest of my efforts

are merely the reflections of the flame which you have kindled. I intend to be your son-in-law that we may never part. My wife, heavens! what could she be to me but a machine for child-bearing? whereas the divinity, the sublime being will be – you," he whispered in her ear.

"You are Satan!" she said, in a sort of terror.

"No, I am something of a poet, like all the men of my region. Come, be my Josephine! I'll go and see you to-morrow. I have the most ardent desire to see where you live and how you live, the furniture you use, the color of your stuffs, the arrangement of all things about you. I long to see the pearl in its shell."

He slipped away cleverly after these words, without waiting for an answer.

Flavie, to whom in all her life love had never taken the language of romance, sat still, but happy, her heart palpitating, and saying to herself that it was very difficult to escape such influence. For the first time Theodose had appeared in a pair of new trousers, with gray silk stockings and pumps, a waistcoat of black silk, and a cravat of black satin on the knot of which shone a plain gold pin selected with taste. He wore also a new coat in the last fashion, and yellow gloves, relieved by white shirt-cuffs; he was the only man who had manners, or deportment in that salon, which was now filling up for the evening.

Madame Pron, nee Barniol, arrived with two school-girls, aged seventeen, confided to her maternal care by families residing in Martinique. Monsieur Pron, professor of rhetoric

in a college presided over by priests, belonged to the Phellion class; but, instead of expanding on the surface in phrases and demonstrations, and posing as an example, he was dry and sententious. Monsieur and Madame Pron, the flowers of the Phellion salon, received every Monday. Though a professor, the little man danced. He enjoyed great influence in the quarter enclosed by the boulevard du Mont-Parnasse, the Luxembourg, and the rue de Sevres. Therefore, as soon as Phellion saw his friend, he took him by the arm into a corner to inform him of the Thuillier candidacy. After ten minutes' consultation they both went to find Thuillier, and the recess of a window, opposite to that where Flavie still sat absorbed in her reflections, no doubt, heard a "trio" worthy, in its way, of that of the Swiss in "Guillaume Tell."

"Do you see," said Theodose, returning to Flavie, "the pure and honest Phellion intriguing over there? Give a personal reason to a virtuous man and he'll paddle in the slimiest puddle; he is hooking that little Pron, and Pron is taking it all in, solely to get your little Celeste for Felix Phellion. Separate them, and in ten minutes they'll get together again, and that young Minard will be growling round them like an angry bulldog."

Felix, still under the strong emotion imparted to him by Celeste's generous action and the cry that came from the girl's heart, though no one but Madame Thuillier still thought of it, became inspired by one of those ingenuous artfulnesses which are the honest charlatanism of true love; but he was not to

the manner born of it, and mathematics, moreover, made him somewhat absent-minded. He stationed himself near Madame Thuillier, imagining that Madame Thuillier would attract Celeste to her side. This astute calculation succeeded all the better because young Minard, who saw in Celeste nothing more than a "dot," had no such sudden inspiration, and was drinking his coffee and talking politics with Laudigeois, Monsieur Barniol, and Dutocq by order of his father, who was thinking and planning for the general election of the legislature in 1842.

"Who wouldn't love Celeste?" said Felix to Madame Thuillier.

"Little darling, no one in the world loves me as she does," replied the poor slave, with difficulty restraining her tears.

"Ah! madame, we both love you," said the candid professor, sincerely.

"What are you saying to each other?" asked Celeste, coming up.

"My child," said the pious woman, drawing her god-daughter down to her and kissing her on the forehead. "He said that you both loved me."

"Do not be angry with my presumption, mademoiselle. Let me do all I can to prove it," murmured Felix. "Ah! I cannot help it, I was made this way; injustice revolts me to the soul! Yes, the Saviour of men was right to promise the future to the meek heart, to the slain lamb! A man who did not love you, Celeste, must have adored you after that sublime impulse of yours at table. Ah, yes! innocence alone can console the martyr. You are a kind young

girl; you will be one of those wives who make the glory and the happiness of a family. Happy be he whom you will choose!"

"Godmamma, with what eyes do you think Monsieur Felix sees me?"

"He appreciates you, my little angel; I shall pray to God for both of you."

"If you knew how happy I am that my father can do a service to Monsieur Thuillier, and how I wish I could be useful to your brother – "

"In short," said Celeste, laughing, "you love us all."

"Well, yes," replied Felix.

True love wraps itself in the mysteries of reserve, even in its expression; it proves itself by itself; it does not feel the necessity, as a false love does, of lighting a conflagration. By an observer (if such a being could have glided into the Thuillier salon) a book might have been made in comparing the two scenes of love-making, and in watching the enormous preparations of Theodose and the simplicity of Felix: one was nature, the other was society, – the true and the false embodied. Noticing her daughter glowing with happiness, exhaling her soul through the pores of her face, and beautiful with the beauty of a young girl gathering the first roses of an indirect declaration, Flavie had an impulse of jealousy in her heart. She came across to Celeste and said in her ear: —

"You are not behaving well, my daughter; everybody is observing you; you are compromising yourself by talking so long

to Monsieur Felix without knowing whether we approve of it."

"But, mamma, my godmother is here."

"Ah! pardon me, dear friend," said Madame Colleville; "I did not notice you."

"You do as others do," said the poor nonentity.

That reply stung Madame Colleville, who regarded it as a barbed arrow. She cast a haughty glance at Felix and said to Celeste, "Sit there, my daughter," seating herself at the same time beside Madame Thuillier and pointing to a chair on the other side of her.

"I will work myself to death," said Felix to Madame Thuillier. "I'll be a member of the Academy of Sciences; I'll make some great discovery, and win her hand by force of fame."

"Ah!" thought the poor woman to herself, "I ought to have had a gentle, peaceful, learned man like that. I might have slowly developed in a life of quietness. It was not thy will, O God! but, I pray thee, unite and bless these children; they are made for one another."

And she sat there, pensive, listening to the racket made by her sister-in-law – a ten-horse power at work – who now, lending a hand to her two servants, cleared the table, taking everything out of the dining-room to accommodate the dancers, vociferating, like the captain of a frigate on his quarter-deck when taking his ship into action: "Have you plenty of raspberry syrup?" "Run out and buy some more orgeat!" "There's not enough glasses. Where's the 'eau rougie'? Take those six bottles of 'vin ordinaire'

and make more. Mind that Coffinet, the porter, doesn't get any." "Caroline, my girl, you are to wait at the sideboard; you'll have tongue and ham to slice in case they dance till morning. But mind, no waste! Keep an eye on everything. Pass me the broom; put more oil in those lamps; don't make blunders. Arrange the remains of the dessert so as to make a show on the sideboard; ask my sister to come and help us. I'm sure I don't know what she's thinking about, that dawdle! Heavens, how slow she is! Here, take away these chairs, they'll want all the room they can get."

The salon was full of Barniols, Colleville, Phellions, Laudigeois, and many others whom the announcement of a dance at the Thuilliers', spread about in the Luxembourg between two and four in the afternoon, the hour at which the bourgeoisie takes its walk, had drawn thither.

"Are you ready, Brigitte?" said Colleville, bolting into the dining-room; "it is nine o'clock, and they are packed as close as herrings in the salon. Cardot, his wife and son and daughter and future son-in-law have just come, accompanied by that young Vinet; the whole faubourg Saint Antoine is debouching. Can't we move the piano in here?"

Then he gave the signal, by tuning his clarionet, the joyous sounds of which were greeted with huzzas from the salon.

It is useless to describe a ball of this kind. The toilets, faces, and conversations were all in keeping with one fact which will surely suffice even the dullest imagination; they passed round, on tarnished and discolored trays, common tumblers filled with

wine, “eau rougie,” and “eau sucree.” The trays on which were glasses of orgeat and glasses of syrup and water appeared only at long intervals. There were five card-tables and twenty-five players, and eighteen dancers of both sexes. At one o’clock in the morning, all present – Madame Thuillier, Mademoiselle Brigitte, Madame Phellion, even Phellion himself – were dragged into the vivacities of a country-dance, vulgarly called “La Boulangere,” in which Dutocq figured with a veil over his head, after the manner of the Kabyl. The servants who were waiting to escort their masters home, and those of the household, were audience to this performance; and after the interminable dance had lasted one whole hour it was proposed to carry Brigitte in triumph when she gave the announcement that supper was served. This circumstance made her see the necessity of hiding a dozen bottles of old burgundy. In short, the company had amused themselves so well, the matrons as well as the young girls, that Thuillier found occasion to say: —

“Well, well, this morning we little thought we should have such a fete to-night.”

“There’s never more pleasure,” said the notary Cardot, “than in just such improvised balls. Don’t talk to me of parties where everybody stands on ceremony.”

This opinion, we may remark, is a standing axiom among the bourgeoisie.

“Well, for my part,” said Madame Minard, “I prefer the dignified old ways.”

"We didn't mean that for you, madame; your salon is the chosen haunt of pleasure," said Dutocq.

When "La Boulangere" came to an end, Theodose pulled Dutocq from the sideboard where he was preparing to eat a slice of tongue, and said to him: —

"Let us go; we must be at Cerizet's very early in the morning; we ought both of us to think over that affair; it is not so easy to manage as Cerizet seems to imagine."

"Why not?" asked Dutocq, bringing his slice of tongue to eat in the salon.

"Don't you know the law?"

"I know enough of it to be aware of the dangers of the affair. If that notary wants the house and we filch it from him, there are means by which he can recover it; he can put himself into the skin of a registered creditor. By the present legal system relating to mortgages, when a house is sold at the request of creditors, if the price obtained for it at auction is not enough to pay all debts, the owners have the right to bid it in and hold it for a higher sum; now the notary, seeing himself caught, may back out of the sale in that way."

"Well," said la Peyrade, "it needs attention."

"Very good," replied Dutocq, "we'll go and see Cerizet."

These words, "go and see Cerizet," were overheard by Minard, who was following the two associates; but they offered no meaning to his mind. The two men were so outside of his own course and projects that he heard them without listening to them.

“This has been one of the finest days in our lives,” said Brigitte to her brother, when she found herself alone with him in the deserted salon, at half-past two in the morning. “What a distinction! to be thus selected by your fellow-citizens!”

“Don’t be mistaken about it, Brigitte; we owe it all, my child, to one man.”

“What man?”

“To our friend, la Peyrade.”

CHAPTER IX. THE BANKER OF THE POOR

It was not on the next day, Monday, but on the following day, Tuesday, that Dutocq and Theodose went to see Cerizet, the former having called la Peyrade's attention to the fact that Cerizet always absented himself on Sundays and Mondays, taking advantage of the total absence of clients on those days, which are devoted by the populace to debauch. The house toward which they directed their steps is one of the striking features in the faubourg Saint-Jacques, and it is quite as important to study it here as it was to study those of Phellion and Thuillier. It is not known (true, no commission has yet been appointed to examine this phenomenon), no one knows why certain quarters become degraded and vulgarized, morally as well as materially; why, for instance, the ancient residence of the court and the church, the Luxembourg and the Latin quarter, have become what they are to-day, in spite of the presence of the finest palaces in the world, in spite of the bold cupola of Sainte-Genevieve, that of Mansard on the Val-de-Grace, and the charms of the Jardin des Plantes. One asks one's self why the elegance of life has left that region; why the Vauquer houses, the Phellion and the Thuillier houses now swarm with tenants and boarders, on the site of so many noble and religious buildings, and why such mud and dirty trades and poverty should have fastened on a hilly piece of ground,

instead of spreading out upon the flat land beyond the confines of the ancient city.

The angel whose beneficence once hovered above this quarter being dead, usury, on the lowest scale, rushed in and took his place. To the old judge, Popinot, succeeded Cerizet; and strange to say, – a fact which it is well to study, – the effect produced, socially speaking, was much the same. Popinot loaned money without interest, and was willing to lose; Cerizet lost nothing, and compelled the poor to work hard and stay virtuous. The poor adored Popinot, but they did not hate Cerizet. Here, in this region, revolves the lowest wheel of Parisian financiering. At the top, Nucingen & Co., the Kellers, du Tillet, and the Mongenods; a little lower down, the Palmas, Gigonnets, and Gobsecks; lower still, the Samonons, Chaboisseaus, and Barbets; and lastly (after the pawn-shops) comes this king of usury, who spreads his nets at the corners of the streets to entangle all miseries and miss none, – Cerizet, "money lender by the little week."

The frogged frock-coat will have prepared you for the den in which this convicted stock-broker carried on his present business.

The house was humid with saltpetre; the walls, sweating moisture, were enamelled all over with large slabs of mould. Standing at the corner of the rue des Postes and rue des Poules, it presented first a ground-floor, occupied partly by a shop for the sale of the commonest kind of wine, painted a coarse bright red, decorated with curtains of red calico, furnished with a leaden

counter, and guarded by formidable iron bars. Above the gate of an odious alley hung a frightful lantern, on which were the words "Night lodgings here." The outer walls were covered with iron crossbars, showing, apparently, the insecurity of the building, which was owned by the wine-merchant, who also inhabited the entresol. The widow Poiret (nee Michonneau) kept furnished lodgings on the first, second, and third floors, consisting of single rooms for workmen and for the poorest class of students.

Cerizet occupied one room on the ground-floor and another in the entresol, to which he mounted by an interior staircase; this entresol looked out upon a horrible paved court, from which arose mephitic odors. Cerizet paid forty francs a month to the widow Poiret for his breakfast and dinner; he thus conciliated her by becoming her boarder; he also made himself acceptable to the wine-merchant by procuring him an immense sale of wine and liquors among his clients – profits realized before sunrise; the wine-shop beginning operations about three in the morning in summer, and five in winter.

The hour of the great Market, which so many of his clients, male and female, attended, was the determining cause of Cerizet's early hours. The Sieur Cadenet, the wine-merchant, in view of the custom which he owed to the usurer, had let him the two rooms for the low price of eighty francs a year, and had given him a lease for twelve years, which Cerizet alone had a right to break, without paying indemnity, at three months' notice. Cadenet always carried in a bottle of excellent wine for the dinner

of this useful tenant; and when Cerizet was short of money he had only to say to his friend, "Cadenet, lend me a few hundred francs," – loans which he faithfully repaid.

Cadenet, it was said, had proof of the widow Poiret having deposited in Cerizet's hands some two thousand francs for investment, which may explain the progress of the latter's affairs since the day when he first took up his abode in the quarter, supplied with a last note of a thousand francs and Dutocq's protection. Cadenet, prompted by a cupidity which success increased, had proposed, early in the year, to put twenty thousand francs into the hands of his friend Cerizet. But Cerizet had positively declined them, on the ground that he ran risks of a nature to become a possible cause of dispute with associates.

"I could only," he said to Cadenet, "take them at six per cent interest, and you can do better than that in your own business. We will go into partnership later, if you like, in some serious enterprise, some good opportunity which may require, say, fifty thousand francs. When you have got that sum to invest, let me know, and we'll talk about it."

Cerizet had only suggested the affair of the house to Theodose after making sure that among the three, Madame Poiret, Cadenet, and himself, it was impossible to raise the full sum of one hundred thousand francs.

The "lender by the little week" was thus in perfect safety in his den, where he could even, if necessity came, appeal to the law. On certain mornings there might be seen as many as sixty

or eighty persons, men as often as women, either in the wine-shop, or the alley, or sitting on the staircase, for the distrustful Cerizet would only admit six persons at a time into his office. The first comers were first served, and each had to go by his number, which the wine-merchant, or his shop-boy, affixed to the hats of the man and the backs of the women. Sometimes the clients would sell to each other (as hackney-coachmen do on the cabstands), head numbers for tail numbers. On certain days, when the market business was pressing, a head number was often sold for a glass of brandy and a sou. The numbers, as they issued from Cerizet's office, called up the succeeding numbers; and if any disputes arose Cadenet put a stop to the fray at once my remarking: —

"If you get the police here you won't gain anything; *he*'ll shut up shop."

HE was Cerizet's name. When, in the course of the day, some hapless woman, without an atom of food in her room, and seeing her children pale with hunger, would come to borrow ten or twenty sous, she would say to the wine-merchant anxiously: —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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