HONORÉ DE BALZAC

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Содержание

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Towards three o'clock in the afternoon of one October day in the year 1844, a man of sixty or thereabouts, whom anybody might have credited with more than his actual age, was walking along the Boulevard des Italiens with his head bent down, as if he were tracking some one. There was a smug expression about the mouth – he looked like a merchant who has just done a good stroke of business, or a bachelor emerging from a boudoir in the best of humors with himself; and in Paris this is the highest degree of self-satisfaction ever registered by a human countenance.

As soon as the elderly person appeared in the distance, a smile broke out over the faces of the frequenters of the boulevard, who daily, from their chairs, watch the passers-by, and indulge in the agreeable pastime of analyzing them. That smile is peculiar to Parisians; it says so many things – ironical, quizzical, pitying; but nothing save the rarest of human curiosities can summon that look of interest to the faces of Parisians, sated as they are with every possible sight.

A saying recorded of Hyacinthe, an actor celebrated for

his repartees, will explain the archaeological value of the old gentleman, and the smile repeated like an echo by all eyes. Somebody once asked Hyacinthe where the hats were made that set the house in a roar as soon as he appeared. "I don't have them made," he said; "I keep them!" So also among the million actors who make up the great troupe of Paris, there are unconscious Hyacinthes who "keep" all the absurd freaks of vanished fashions upon their backs; and the apparition of some bygone decade will startle you into laughter as you walk the streets in bitterness of soul over the treason of one who was your friend in the past.

In some respects the passer-by adhered so faithfully to the fashions of the year 1806, that he was not so much a burlesque caricature as a reproduction of the Empire period. To an observer, accuracy of detail in a revival of this sort is extremely valuable, but accuracy of detail, to be properly appreciated, demands the critical attention of an expert *flaneur*; while the man in the street who raises a laugh as soon as he comes in sight is bound to be one of those outrageous exhibitions which stare you in the face, as the saying goes, and produce the kind of effect which an actor tries to secure for the success of his entry. The elderly person, a thin, spare man, wore a nut-brown spencer over a coat of uncertain green, with white metal buttons. A man in a spencer in the year 1844! it was as if Napoleon himself had vouchsafed to come to life again for a couple of hours.

The spencer, as its name indicates, was the invention of an English lord, vain, doubtless, of his handsome shape. Some time

before the Peace of Amiens, this nobleman solved the problem of covering the bust without destroying the outlines of the figure and encumbering the person with the hideous boxcoat, now finishing its career on the backs of aged hackney cabmen; but, elegant figures being in the minority, the success of the spencer was short-lived in France, English though it was.

At the sight of the spencer, men of forty or fifty mentally invested the wearer with top-boots, pistachio-colored kerseymere small clothes adorned with a knot of ribbon; and beheld themselves in the costumes of their youth. Elderly ladies thought of former conquests; but the younger men were asking each other why the aged Alcibiades had cut off the skirts of his overcoat. The rest of the costume was so much in keeping with the spencer, that you would not have hesitated to call the wearer "an Empire man," just as you call a certain kind of furniture "Empire furniture;" yet the newcomer only symbolized the Empire for those who had known that great and magnificent epoch at any rate *de visu*, for a certain accuracy of memory was needed for the full appreciation of the costume, and even now the Empire is so far away that not every one of us can picture it in its Gallo-Grecian reality.

The stranger's hat, for instance, tipped to the back of his head so as to leave almost the whole forehead bare, recalled a certain jaunty air, with which civilians and officials attempted to swagger it with military men; but the hat itself was a shocking specimen of the fifteen-franc variety. Constant friction with a

pair of enormous ears had left their marks which no brush could efface from the underside of the brim; the silk tissue (as usual) fitted badly over the cardboard foundation, and hung in wrinkles here and there; and some skin-disease (apparently) had attacked the nap in spite of the hand which rubbed it down of a morning.

Beneath the hat, which seemed ready to drop off at any moment, lay an expanse of countenance grotesque and droll, as the faces which the Chinese alone of all people can imagine for their quaint curiosities. The broad visage was as full of holes as a colander, honeycombed with the shadows of the dints, hollowed out like a Roman mask. It set all the laws of anatomy at defiance. Close inspection failed to detect the substructure. Where you expected to find a bone, you discovered a layer of cartilaginous tissue, and the hollows of an ordinary human face were here filled out with flabby bosses. A pair of gray eyes, red-rimmed and lashless, looked forlornly out of a countenance which was flattened something after the fashion of a pumpkin, and surmounted by a Don Quixote nose that rose out of it like a monolith above a plain. It was the kind of nose, as Cervantes must surely have explained somewhere, which denotes an inborn enthusiasm for all things great, a tendency which is apt to degenerate into credulity.

And yet, though the man's ugliness was something almost ludicrous, it aroused not the slightest inclination to laugh. The exceeding melancholy which found an outlet in the poor man's faded eyes reached the mocker himself and froze the gibes

on his lips; for all at once the thought arose that this was a human creature to whom Nature had forbidden any expression of love or tenderness, since such expression could only be painful or ridiculous to the woman he loved. In the presence of such misfortune a Frenchman is silent; to him it seems the most cruel of all afflictions – to be unable to please!

The man so ill-favored was dressed after the fashion of shabby gentility, a fashion which the rich not seldom try to copy. He wore low shoes beneath gaiters of the pattern worn by the Imperial Guard, doubtless for the sake of economy, because they kept the socks clean. The rusty tinge of his black breeches, like the cut and the white or shiny line of the creases, assigned the date of the purchase some three years back. The roomy garments failed to disguise the lean proportions of the wearer, due apparently rather to constitution than to a Pythagorean regimen, for the worthy man was endowed with thick lips and a sensual mouth; and when he smiled, displayed a set of white teeth which would have done credit to a shark.

A shawl-waistcoat, likewise of black cloth, was supplemented by a white under-waistcoat, and yet again beneath this gleamed the edge of a red knitted under-jacket, to put you in mind of Garat's five waistcoats. A huge white muslin stock with a conspicuous bow, invented by some exquisite to charm "the charming sex" in 1809, projected so far above the wearer's chin that the lower part of his face was lost, as it were, in a muslin abyss. A silk watch-guard, plaited to resemble the keepsakes

made of hair, meandered down the shirt front and secured his watch from the improbable theft. The greenish coat, though older by some three years than the breeches, was remarkably neat; the black velvet collar and shining metal buttons, recently renewed, told of carefulness which descended even to trifles.

The particular manner of fixing the hat on the occiput, the triple waistcoat, the vast cravat engulfing the chin, the gaiters, the metal buttons on the greenish coat, – all these reminiscences of Imperial fashions were blended with a sort of afterwaft and lingering perfume of the coquetry of the Incroyable – with an indescribable finical something in the folds of the garments, a certain air of stiffness and correctness in the demeanor that smacked of the school of David, that recalled Jacob's spindle-legged furniture.

At first sight, moreover, you set him down either for the gentleman by birth fallen a victim to some degrading habit, or for the man of small independent means whose expenses are calculated to such a nicety that the breakage of a windowpane, a rent in a coat, or a visit from the philanthropic pest who asks you for subscriptions to a charity, absorbs the whole of a month's little surplus of pocket-money. If you had seen him that afternoon, you would have wondered how that grotesque face came to be lighted up with a smile; usually, surely, it must have worn the dispirited, passive look of the obscure toiler condemned to labor without ceasing for the barest necessaries of life. Yet when you noticed that the odd-looking old man was carrying some object (evidently

precious) in his right hand with a mother's care; concealing it under the skirts of his coat to keep it from collisions in the crowd, and still more, when you remarked that important air always assumed by an idler when intrusted with a commission, you would have suspected him of recovering some piece of lost property, some modern equivalent of the marquise's poodle; you would have recognized the assiduous gallantry of the "man of the Empire" returning in triumph from his mission to some charming woman of sixty, reluctant as yet to dispense with the daily visit of her elderly *attentif*.

In Paris only among great cities will you see such spectacles as this; for of her boulevards Paris makes a stage where a never-ending drama is played gratuitously by the French nation in the interests of Art.

In spite of the rashly assumed spencer, you would scarcely have thought, after a glance at the contours of the man's bony frame, that this was an artist – that conventional type which is privileged, in something of the same way as a Paris gamin, to represent riotous living to the bourgeois and philistine mind, the most *mirific* joviality, in short (to use the old Rabelaisian word newly taken into use). Yet this elderly person had once taken the medal and the traveling scholarship; he had composed the first cantata crowned by the Institut at the time of the re-establishment of the Academie de Rome; he was M. Sylvain Pons, in fact – M. Sylvain Pons, whose name appears on the covers of well-known sentimental songs trilled by our mothers,

to say nothing of a couple of operas, played in 1815 and 1816, and divers unpublished scores. The worthy soul was now ending his days as the conductor of an orchestra in a boulevard theatre, and a music master in several young ladies' boarding-schools, a post for which his face particularly recommended him. He was entirely dependent upon his earnings. Running about to give private lessons at his age! – Think of it. How many a mystery lies in that unromantic situation!

But the last man to wear the spencer carried something about him besides his Empire Associations; a warning and a lesson was written large over that triple waistcoat. Wherever he went, he exhibited, without fee or charge, one of the many victims of the fatal system of competition which still prevails in France in spite of a century of trial without result; for Poisson de Marigny, brother of the Pompadour and Director of Fine Arts, somewhere about 1746 invented this method of applying pressure to the brain. That was a hundred years ago. Try if you can count upon your fingers the men of genius among the prizemen of those hundred years.

In the first place, no deliberate effort of schoolmaster or administrator can replace the miracles of chance which produce great men: of all the mysteries of generation, this most defies the ambitious modern scientific investigator. In the second – the ancient Egyptians (we are told) invented incubator-stoves for hatching eggs; what would be thought of Egyptians who should neglect to fill the beaks of the callow fledglings? Yet this is

precisely what France is doing. She does her utmost to produce artists by the artificial heat of competitive examination; but, the sculptor, painter, engraver, or musician once turned out by this mechanical process, she no more troubles herself about them and their fate than the dandy cares for yesterday's flower in his buttonhole. And so it happens that the really great man is a Greuze, a Watteau, a Felicien David, a Pagnesi, a Gericault, a Decamps, an Auber, a David d'Angers, an Eugene Delacroix, or a Meissonier – artists who take but little heed of *grande prix*, and spring up in the open field under the rays of that invisible sun called Vocation.

To resume. The Government sent Sylvain Pons to Rome to make a great musician of himself; and in Rome Sylvain Pons acquired a taste for the antique and works of art. He became an admirable judge of those masterpieces of the brain and hand which are summed up by the useful neologism "bric-a-brac;" and when the child of Euterpe returned to Paris somewhere about the year 1810, it was in the character of a rabid collector, loaded with pictures, statuettes, frames, wood-carving, ivories, enamels, porcelains, and the like. He had sunk the greater part of his patrimony, not so much in the purchases themselves as on the expenses of transit; and every penny inherited from his mother had been spent in the course of a three-years' travel in Italy after the residence in Rome came to an end. He had seen Venice, Milan, Florence, Bologna, and Naples leisurely, as he wished to see them, as a dreamer of dreams, and a philosopher; careless of

the future, for an artist looks to his talent for support as the *fille de joie* counts upon her beauty.

All through those splendid years of travel Pons was as happy as was possible to a man with a great soul, a sensitive nature, and a face so ugly that any "success with the fair" (to use the stereotyped formula of 1809) was out of the question; the realities of life always fell short of the ideals which Pons created for himself; the world without was not in tune with the soul within, but Pons had made up his mind to the dissonance. Doubtless the sense of beauty that he had kept pure and living in his inmost soul was the spring from which the delicate, graceful, and ingenious music flowed and won him reputation between 1810 and 1814.

Every reputation founded upon the fashion or the fancy of the hour, or upon the short-lived follies of Paris, produces its Pons. No place in the world is so inexorable in great things; no city of the globe so disdainfully indulgent in small. Pons' notes were drowned before long in floods of German harmony and the music of Rossini; and if in 1824 he was known as an agreeable musician, a composer of various drawing-room melodies, judge if he was likely to be famous in 1831! In 1844, the year in which the single drama of this obscure life began, Sylvain Pons was of no more value than an antediluvian semiquaver; dealers in music had never heard of his name, though he was still composing, on scanty pay, for his own orchestra or for neighboring theatres.

And yet, the worthy man did justice to the great masters

of our day; a masterpiece finely rendered brought tears to his eyes; but his religion never bordered on mania, as in the case of Hoffmann's Kreislers; he kept his enthusiasm to himself; his delight, like the paradise reached by opium or hashish, lay within his own soul.

The gift of admiration, of comprehension, the single faculty by which the ordinary man becomes the brother of the poet, is rare in the city of Paris, that inn whither all ideas, like travelers, come to stay for awhile; so rare is it, that Pons surely deserves our respectful esteem. His personal failure may seem anomalous, but he frankly admitted that he was weak in harmony. He had neglected the study of counterpoint; there was a time when he might have begun his studies afresh and held his own among modern composers, when he might have been, not certainly a Rossini, but a Herold. But he was alarmed by the intricacies of modern orchestration; and at length, in the pleasures of collecting, he found such ever-renewed compensation for his failure, that if he had been made to choose between his curiosities and the fame of Rossini – will it be believed? – Pons would have pronounced for his beloved collection.

Pons was of the opinion of Chenavard, the print-collector, who laid it down as an axiom – that you only fully enjoy the pleasure of looking at your Ruysdael, Hobbema, Holbein, Raphael, Murillo, Greuze, Sebastian del Piombo, Giorgione, Albrecht Durer, or what not, when you have paid less than sixty francs for your picture. Pons never gave more than a hundred

francs for any purchase. If he laid out as much as fifty francs, he was careful to assure himself beforehand that the object was worth three thousand. The most beautiful thing in the world, if it cost three hundred francs, did not exist for Pons. Rare had been his bargains; but he possessed the three qualifications for success – a stag's legs, an idler's disregard of time, and the patience of a Jew.

This system, carried out for forty years, in Rome or Paris alike, had borne its fruits. Since Pons returned from Italy, he had regularly spent about two thousand francs a year upon a collection of masterpieces of every sort and description, a collection hidden away from all eyes but his own; and now his catalogue had reached the incredible number of 1907. Wandering about Paris between 1811 and 1816, he had picked up many a treasure for ten francs, which would fetch a thousand or twelve hundred to-day. Some forty-five thousand canvases change hands annually in Paris picture sales, and these Pons had sifted through year by year. Pons had Sevres porcelain, *pate tendre*, bought of Auvergnats, those satellites of the Black Band who sacked chateaux and carried off the marvels of Pompadour France in their tumbril carts; he had, in fact, collected the drifted wreck of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; he recognized the genius of the French school, and discerned the merit of the Lepautres and Lavallee-Poussins and the rest of the great obscure creators of the Genre Louis Quinze and the Genre Louis Seize. Our modern craftsmen now draw without acknowledgment from

them, pore incessantly over the treasures of the Cabinet des Estampes, borrow adroitly, and give out their *pastiches* for new inventions. Pons had obtained many a piece by exchange, and therein lies the ineffable joy of the collector. The joy of buying bric-a-brac is a secondary delight; in the give-and-take of barter lies the joy of joys. Pons had begun by collecting snuff-boxes and miniatures; his name was unknown in bric-a-bracology, for he seldom showed himself in salesrooms or in the shops of well-known dealers; Pons was not aware that his treasures had any commercial value.

The late lamented Dusommerard tried his best to gain Pons' confidence, but the prince of bric-a-brac died before he could gain an entrance to the Pons museum, the one private collection which could compare with the famous Sauvageot museum. Pons and M. Sauvageot indeed resembled each other in more ways than one. M. Sauvageot, like Pons, was a musician; he was likewise a comparatively poor man, and he had collected his bric-a-brac in much the same way, with the same love of art, the same hatred of rich capitalists with well-known names who collect for the sake of running up prices as cleverly as possible. There was yet another point of resemblance between the pair; Pons, like his rival competitor and antagonist, felt in his heart an insatiable craving after specimens of the craftsman's skill and miracles of workmanship; he loved them as a man might love a fair mistress; an auction in the salerooms in the Rue des Jeuneurs, with its accompaniments of hammer strokes and brokers' men, was a

crime of *lese-bric-a-brac* in Pons' eyes. Pons' museum was for his own delight at every hour; for the soul created to know and feel all the beauty of a masterpiece has this in common with the lover – to-day's joy is as great as the joy of yesterday; possession never palls; and a masterpiece, happily, never grows old. So the object that he held in his hand with such fatherly care could only be a "find," carried off with what affection amateurs alone know!

After the first outlines of this biographical sketch, every one will cry at once, "Why! this is the happiest man on earth, in spite of his ugliness!" And, in truth, no spleen, no dullness can resist the counter-irritant supplied by a "craze," the intellectual moxa of a hobby. You who can no longer drink of "the cup of pleasure," as it has been called through all ages, try to collect something, no matter what (people have been known to collect placards), so shall you receive the small change for the gold ingot of happiness. Have you a hobby? You have transferred pleasure to the plane of ideas. And yet, you need not envy the worthy Pons; such envy, like all kindred sentiments, would be founded upon a misapprehension.

With a nature so sensitive, with a soul that lived by tireless admiration of the magnificent achievements of art, of the high rivalry between human toil and the work of Nature – Pons was a slave to that one of the Seven Deadly Sins with which God surely will deal least hardly; Pons was a glutton. A narrow income, combined with a passion for bric-a-brac, condemned him to a regimen so abhorrent to a discriminating palate, that, bachelor as

he was, he had cut the knot of the problem by dining out every day.

Now, in the time of the Empire, celebrities were more sought after than at present, perhaps because there were so few of them, perhaps because they made little or no political pretension. In those days, besides, you could set up for a poet, a musician, or a painter, with so little expense. Pons, being regarded as the probable rival of Nicolo, Paer, and Berton, used to receive so many invitations, that he was forced to keep a list of engagements, much as barristers note down the cases for which they are retained. And Pons behaved like an artist. He presented his amphitryons with copies of his songs, he "obliged" at the pianoforte, he brought them orders for boxes at the Feydeau, his own theatre, he organized concerts, he was not above taking the fiddle himself sometimes in a relation's house, and getting up a little impromptu dance. In those days, all the handsome men in France were away at the wars exchanging sabre-cuts with the handsome men of the Coalition. Pons was said to be, not ugly, but "peculiar-looking," after the grand rule laid down by Moliere in Eliante's famous couplets; but if he sometimes heard himself described as a "charming man" (after he had done some fair lady a service), his good fortune went no further than words.

It was between the years 1810 and 1816 that Pons contracted the unlucky habit of dining out; he grew accustomed to see his hosts taking pains over the dinner, procuring the first and best of everything, bringing out their choicest vintages, seeing carefully

to the dessert, the coffee, the liqueurs, giving him of their best, in short; the best, moreover, of those times of the Empire when Paris was glutted with kings and queens and princes, and many a private house emulated royal splendours.

People used to play at Royalty then as they play nowadays at parliament, creating a whole host of societies with presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries and what not – agricultural societies, industrial societies, societies for the promotion of sericulture, viticulture, the growth of flax, and so forth. Some have even gone so far as to look about them for social evils in order to start a society to cure them.

But to return to Pons. A stomach thus educated is sure to react upon the owner's moral fibre; the demoralization of the man varies directly with his progress in culinary sapience. Voluptuousness, lurking in every secret recess of the heart, lays down the law therein. Honor and resolution are battered in breach. The tyranny of the palate has never been described; as a necessity of life it escapes the criticism of literature; yet no one imagines how many have been ruined by the table. The luxury of the table is indeed, in this sense, the courtesan's one competitor in Paris, besides representing in a manner the credit side in another account, where she figures as the expenditure.

With Pons' decline and fall as an artist came his simultaneous transformation from invited guest to parasite and hanger-on; he could not bring himself to quit dinners so excellently served for the Spartan broth of a two-franc ordinary. Alas! alas! a shudder

ran through him at the mere thought of the great sacrifices which independence required him to make. He felt that he was capable of sinking to even lower depths for the sake of good living, if there were no other way of enjoying the first and best of everything, of guzzling (vulgar but expressive word) nice little dishes carefully prepared. Pons lived like a bird, pilfering his meal, flying away when he had taken his fill, singing a few notes by way of return; he took a certain pleasure in the thought that he lived at the expense of society, which asked of him – what but the trifling toll of grimaces? Like all confirmed bachelors, who hold their lodgings in horror, and live as much as possible in other people's houses, Pons was accustomed to the formulas and facial contortions which do duty for feeling in the world; he used compliments as small change; and as far as others were concerned, he was satisfied with the labels they bore, and never plunged a too-curious hand into the sack.

This not intolerable phase lasted for another ten years. Such years! Pons' life was closing with a rainy autumn. All through those years he contrived to dine without expense by making himself necessary in the houses which he frequented. He took the first step in the downward path by undertaking a host of small commissions; many and many a time Pons ran on errands instead of the porter or the servant; many a purchase he made for his entertainers. He became a kind of harmless, well-meaning spy, sent by one family into another; but he gained no credit with those for whom he trudged about, and so often sacrificed self-respect.

"Pons is a bachelor," said they; "he is at a loss to know what to do with his time; he is only too glad to trot about for us. – What else would he do?"

Very soon the cold which old age spreads about itself began to set in; the communicable cold which sensibly lowers the social temperature, especially if the old man is ugly and poor. Old and ugly and poor – is not this to be thrice old? Pons' winter had begun, the winter which brings the reddened nose, and frost-nipped cheeks, and the numbed fingers, numb in how many ways!

Invitations very seldom came for Pons now. So far from seeking the society of the parasite, every family accepted him much as they accepted the taxes; they valued nothing that Pons could do for them; real services from Pons counted for nought. The family circles in which the worthy artist revolved had no respect for art or letters; they went down on their knees to practical results; they valued nothing but the fortune or social position acquired since the year 1830. The bourgeoisie is afraid of intellect and genius, but Pons' spirit and manner were not haughty enough to overawe his relations, and naturally he had come at last to be accounted less than nothing with them, though he was not altogether despised.

He had suffered acutely among them, but, like all timid creatures, he kept silence as to his pain; and so by degrees schooled himself to hide his feelings, and learned to take sanctuary in his inmost self. Many superficial persons interpret

this conduct by the short word "selfishness;" and, indeed, the resemblance between the egoist and the solitary human creature is strong enough to seem to justify the harsher verdict; and this is especially true in Paris, where nobody observes others closely, where all things pass swift as waves, and last as little as a Ministry.

So Cousin Pons was accused of selfishness (behind his back); and if the world accuses any one, it usually finds him guilty and condemns him into the bargain. Pons bowed to the decision. Do any of us know how such a timid creature is cast down by an unjust judgment? Who will ever paint all that the timid suffer? This state of things, now growing daily worse, explains the sad expression on the poor old musician's face; he lived by capitulations of which he was ashamed. Every time we sin against self-respect at the bidding of the ruling passion, we rivet its hold upon us; the more that passion requires of us, the stronger it grows, every sacrifice increasing, as it were, the value of a satisfaction for which so much has been given up, till the negative sum-total of renouncements looms very large in a man's imagination. Pons, for instance, after enduring the insolently patronizing looks of some bourgeois, incased in buckram of stupidity, sipped his glass of port or finished his quail with breadcrumbs, and relished something of the savor of revenge, besides. "It is not too dear at the price!" he said to himself.

After all, in the eyes of the moralist, there were extenuating circumstances in Pons' case. Man only lives, in fact, by some

personal satisfaction. The passionless, perfectly righteous man is not human; he is a monster, an angel wanting wings. The angel of Christian mythology has nothing but a head. On earth, the righteous person is the sufficiently tiresome Grandison, for whom the very Venus of the Crosswords is sexless.

Setting aside one or two commonplace adventures in Italy, in which probably the climate accounted for his success, no woman had ever smiled upon Pons. Plenty of men are doomed to this fate. Pons was an abnormal birth; the child of parents well stricken in years, he bore the stigma of his untimely genesis; his cadaverous complexion might have been contracted in the flask of spirit-of-wine in which science preserves some extraordinary foetus. Artist though he was, with his tender, dreamy, sensitive soul, he was forced to accept the character which belonged to his face; it was hopeless to think of love, and he remained a bachelor, not so much of choice as of necessity. Then Gluttony, the sin of the continent monk, beckoned to Pons; he rushed upon temptation, as he had thrown his whole soul into the adoration of art and the cult of music. Good cheer and bric-a-brac gave him the small change for the love which could spend itself in no other way. As for music, it was his profession, and where will you find the man who is in love with his means of earning a livelihood? For it is with a profession as with marriage: in the long length you are sensible of nothing but the drawbacks.

Brillat-Savarin has deliberately set himself to justify the gastronome, but perhaps even he has not dwelt sufficiently on the

reality of the pleasures of the table. The demands of digestion upon the human economy produce an internal wrestling-bout of human forces which rivals the highest degree of amorous pleasure. The gastronome is conscious of an expenditure of vital power, an expenditure so vast that the brain is atrophied (as it were), that a second brain, located in the diaphragm, may come into play, and the suspension of all the faculties is in itself a kind of intoxication. A boa constrictor gorged with an ox is so stupid with excess that the creature is easily killed. What man, on the wrong side of forty, is rash enough to work after dinner? And remark in the same connection, that all great men have been moderate eaters. The exhilarating effect of the wing of a chicken upon invalids recovering from serious illness, and long confined to a stinted and carefully chosen diet, has been frequently remarked. The sober Pons, whose whole enjoyment was concentrated in the exercise of his digestive organs, was in the position of chronic convalescence; he looked to his dinner to give him the utmost degree of pleasurable sensation, and hitherto he had procured such sensations daily. Who dares to bid farewell to old habit? Many a man on the brink of suicide has been plucked back on the threshold of death by the thought of the cafe where he plays his nightly game of dominoes.

In the year 1835, chance avenged Pons for the indifference of womankind by finding him a prop for his declining years, as the saying goes; and he, who had been old from his cradle, found a support in friendship. Pons took to himself the only life-partner

permitted to him among his kind – an old man and a fellow-musician.

But for La Fontaine's fable, *Les Deux Amis*, this sketch should have borne the title of *The Two Friends*; but to take the name of this divine story would surely be a deed of violence, a profanation from which every true man of letters would shrink. The title ought to be borne alone and for ever by the fabulist's masterpiece, the revelation of his soul, and the record of his dreams; those three words were set once and for ever by the poet at the head of a page which is his by a sacred right of ownership; for it is a shrine before which all generations, all over the world, will kneel so long as the art of printing shall endure.

Pons' friend gave lessons on the pianoforte. They met and struck up an acquaintance in 1834, one prize day at a boarding-school; and so congenial were their ways of thinking and living, that Pons used to say that he had found his friend too late for his happiness. Never, perhaps, did two souls, so much alike, find each other in the great ocean of humanity which flowed forth, in disobedience to the will of God, from its source in the Garden of Eden. Before very long the two musicians could not live without each other. Confidences were exchanged, and in a week's time they were like brothers. Schmucke (for that was his name) had not believed that such a man as Pons existed, nor had Pons imagined that a Schmucke was possible. Here already you have a sufficient description of the good couple; but it is not every mind that takes kindly to the concise synthetic method, and a

certain amount of demonstration is necessary if the credulous are to accept the conclusion.

This pianist, like all other pianists, was a German. A German, like the eminent Liszt and the great Mendelssohn, and Steibelt, and Dussek, and Meyer, and Mozart, and Doelher, and Thalberg, and Dreschok, and Hiller, and Leopold Hertz, Woertz, Karr, Wolff, Pixis, and Clara Wieck – and all Germans, generally speaking. Schmucke was a great musical composer doomed to remain a music master, so utterly did his character lack the audacity which a musical genius needs if he is to push his way to the front. A German's naivete does not invariably last him through his life; in some cases it fails after a certain age; and even as a cultivator of the soil brings water from afar by means of irrigation channels, so, from the springs of his youth, does the Teuton draw the simplicity which disarms suspicion – the perennial supplies with which he fertilizes his labors in every field of science, art, or commerce. A crafty Frenchman here and there will turn a Parisian tradesman's stupidity to good account in the same way. But Schmucke had kept his child's simplicity much as Pons continued to wear his relics of the Empire – all unsuspectingly. The true and noble-hearted German was at once the theatre and the audience, making music within himself for himself alone. In this city of Paris he lived as a nightingale lives among the thickets; and for twenty years he sang on, mateless, till he met with a second self in Pons. [See *Une Fille d'Eve*.]

Both Pons and Schmucke were abundantly given, both by

heart and disposition, to the peculiarly German sentimentality which shows itself alike in childlike ways – in a passion for flowers, in that form of nature-worship which prompts a German to plant his garden-beds with big glass globes for the sake of seeing miniature pictures of the view which he can behold about him of a natural size; in the inquiring turn of mind that sets a learned Teuton trudging three hundred miles in his gaiters in search of a fact which smiles up in his face from a wayside spring, or lurks laughing under the jessamine leaves in the back-yard; or (to take a final instance) in the German craving to endow every least detail in creation with a spiritual significance, a craving which produces sometimes Hoffmann's tipsiness in type, sometimes the folios with which Germany hedges the simplest questions round about, lest haply any fool should fall into her intellectual excavations; and, indeed, if you fathom these abysses, you find nothing but a German at the bottom.

Both friends were Catholics. They went to Mass and performed the duties of religion together; and, like children, found nothing to tell their confessors. It was their firm belief that music is to feeling and thought as thought and feeling are to speech; and of their converse on this system there was no end. Each made response to the other in orgies of sound, demonstrating their convictions, each for each, like lovers.

Schmucke was as absent-minded as Pons was wide-awake. Pons was a collector, Schmucke a dreamer of dreams; Schmucke was a student of beauty seen by the soul, Pons a preserver of

material beauty. Pons would catch sight of a china cup and buy it in the time that Schmucke took to blow his nose, wondering the while within himself whether the musical phrase that was ringing in his brain – the *motif* from Rossini or Bellini or Beethoven or Mozart – had its origin or its counterpart in the world of human thought and emotion. Schmucke's economies were controlled by an absent mind, Pons was a spendthrift through passion, and for both the result was the same – they had not a penny on Saint Sylvester's day.

Perhaps Pons would have given way under his troubles if it had not been for this friendship; but life became bearable when he found some one to whom he could pour out his heart. The first time that he breathed a word of his difficulties, the good German had advised him to live as he himself did, and eat bread and cheese at home sooner than dine abroad at such a cost. Alas! Pons did not dare to confess that heart and stomach were at war within him, that he could digest affronts which pained his heart, and, cost what it might, a good dinner that satisfied his palate was a necessity to him, even as your gay Lothario must have a mistress to tease.

In time Schmucke understood; not just at once, for he was too much of a Teuton to possess that gift of swift perception in which the French rejoice; Schmucke understood and loved poor Pons the better. Nothing so fortifies a friendship as a belief on the part of one friend that he is superior to the other. An angel could not have found a word to say to Schmucke rubbing his

hands over the discovery of the hold that gluttony had gained over Pons. Indeed, the good German adorned their breakfast-table next morning with delicacies of which he went in search himself; and every day he was careful to provide something new for his friend, for they always breakfasted together at home.

If any one imagines that the pair could not escape ridicule in Paris, where nothing is respected, he cannot know that city. When Schmucke and Pons united their riches and poverty, they hit upon the economical expedient of lodging together, each paying half the rent of the very unequally divided second-floor of a house in the Rue de Normandie in the Marais. And as it often happened that they left home together and walked side by side along their beat of boulevard, the idlers of the quarter dubbed them "the pair of nutcrackers," a nickname which makes any portrait of Schmucke quite superfluous, for he was to Pons as the famous statue of the Nurse of Niobe in the Vatican is to the Tribune Venus.

Mme. Cibot, portress of the house in the Rue de Normandie, was the pivot on which the domestic life of the nutcrackers turned; but Mme. Cibot plays so large a part in the drama which grew out of their double existence, that it will be more appropriate to give her portrait on her first appearance in this Scene of Parisian Life.

One thing remains to be said of the characters of the pair of friends; but this one thing is precisely the hardest to make clear to ninety-nine readers out of a hundred in this forty-seventh year

of the nineteenth century, perhaps by reason of the prodigious financial development brought about by the railway system. It is a little thing, and yet it is so much. It is a question, in fact, of giving an idea of the extreme sensitiveness of their natures. Let us borrow an illustration from the railways, if only by way of retaliation, as it were, for the loans which they levy upon us. The railway train of to-day, tearing over the metals, grinds away fine particles of dust, grains so minute that a traveler cannot detect them with the eye; but let a single one of those invisible motes find its way into the kidneys, it will bring about that most excruciating, and sometimes fatal, disease known as gravel. And our society, rushing like a locomotive along its metaled track, is heedless of the all but imperceptible dust made by the grinding of the wheels; but it was otherwise with the two musicians; the invisible grains of sand sank perpetually into the very fibres of their being, causing them intolerable anguish of heart. Tender exceedingly to the pain of others, they wept for their own powerlessness to help; and their own susceptibilities were almost morbidly acute. Neither age nor the continual spectacle of the drama of Paris life had hardened two souls still young and childlike and pure; the longer they lived, indeed, the more keenly they felt their inward suffering; for so it is, alas! with natures unsullied by the world, with the quiet thinker, and with such poets among the poets as have never fallen into any excess.

Since the old men began housekeeping together, the day's routine was very nearly the same for them both. They worked

together in harness in the fraternal fashion of the Paris cab-horse; rising every morning, summer and winter, at seven o'clock, and setting out after breakfast to give music lessons in the boarding-schools, in which, upon occasion, they would take lessons for each other. Towards noon Pons repaired to his theatre, if there was a rehearsal on hand; but all his spare moments were spent in sauntering on the boulevards. Night found both of them in the orchestra at the theatre, for Pons had found a place for Schmucke, and upon this wise.

At the time of their first meeting, Pons had just received that marshal's baton of the unknown musical composer – an appointment as conductor of an orchestra. It had come to him unasked, by a favor of Count Popinot, a bourgeois hero of July, at that time a member of the Government. Count Popinot had the license of a theatre in his gift, and Count Popinot had also an old acquaintance of the kind that the successful man blushes to meet. As he rolls through the streets of Paris in his carriage, it is not pleasant to see his boyhood's chum down at heel, with a coat of many improbable colors and trousers innocent of straps, and a head full of soaring speculations on too grand a scale to tempt shy, easily scared capital. Moreover, this friend of his youth, Gaudissart by name, had done not a little in the past towards founding the fortunes of the great house of Popinot. Popinot, now a Count and a peer of France, after twice holding a portfolio had no wish to shake off "the Illustrious Gaudissart." Quite otherwise. The pomps and vanities of the Court of the Citizen-

King had not spoiled the sometime druggist's kind heart; he wished to put his ex-commercial traveler in the way of renewing his wardrobe and replenishing his purse. So when Gaudissart, always an enthusiastic admirer of the fair sex, applied for the license of a bankrupt theatre, Popinot granted it on condition that Pons (a parasite of the Hotel Popinot) should be engaged as conductor of the orchestra; and at the same time, the Count was careful to send certain elderly amateurs of beauty to the theatre, so that the new manager might be strongly supported financially by wealthy admirers of feminine charms revealed by the costume of the ballet.

Gaudissart and Company, who, be it said, made their fortune, hit upon the grand idea of operas for the people, and carried it out in a boulevard theatre in 1834. A tolerable conductor, who could adapt or even compose a little music upon occasion, was a necessity for ballets and pantomimes; but the last management had so long been bankrupt, that they could not afford to keep a transposer and copyist. Pons therefore introduced Schmucke to the company as copier of music, a humble calling which requires no small musical knowledge; and Schmucke, acting on Pons' advice, came to an understanding with the *chef-de-service* at the Opera-Comique, so saving himself the clerical drudgery.

The partnership between Pons and Schmucke produced one brilliant result. Schmucke being a German, harmony was his strong point; he looked over the instrumentation of Pons' compositions, and Pons provided the airs. Here and there an

amateur among the audience admired the new pieces of music which served as accompaniment to two or three great successes, but they attributed the improvement vaguely to "progress." No one cared to know the composer's name; like occupants of the *baignoires*, lost to view of the house, to gain a view of the stage, Pons and Schmucke eclipsed themselves by their success. In Paris (especially since the Revolution of July) no one can hope to succeed unless he will push his way *quibuscumque viis* and with all his might through a formidable host of competitors; but for this feat a man needs thews and sinews, and our two friends, be it remembered, had that affection of the heart which cripples all ambitious effort.

Pons, as a rule, only went to his theatre towards eight o'clock, when the piece in favor came on, and overtures and accompaniments needed the strict ruling of the baton; most minor theatres are lax in such matters, and Pons felt the more at ease because he himself had been by no means grasping in all his dealings with the management; and Schmucke, if need be, could take his place. Time went by, and Schmucke became an institution in the orchestra; the Illustrious Gaudissart said nothing, but he was well aware of the value of Pons' collaborator. He was obliged to include a pianoforte in the orchestra (following the example of the leading theatres); the instrument was placed beside the conductor's chair, and Schmucke played without increase of salary – a volunteer supernumerary. As Schmucke's character, his utter lack of ambition or pretence became known,

the orchestra recognized him as one of themselves; and as time went on, he was intrusted with the often needed miscellaneous musical instruments which form no part of the regular band of a boulevard theatre. For a very small addition to his stipend, Schmucke played the viola d'amore, hautboy, violoncello, and harp, as well as the piano, the castanets for the *cachucha*, the bells, saxhorn, and the like. If the Germans cannot draw harmony from the mighty instruments of Liberty, yet to play all instruments of music comes to them by nature.

The two old artists were exceedingly popular at the theatre, and took its ways philosophically. They had put, as it were, scales over their eyes, lest they should see the offences that needs must come when a *corps de ballet* is blended with actors and actresses, one of the most trying combinations ever created by the laws of supply and demand for the torment of managers, authors, and composers alike.

Every one esteemed Pons with his kindness and his modesty, his great self-respect and respect for others; for a pure and limpid life wins something like admiration from the worst nature in every social sphere, and in Paris a fair virtue meets with something of the success of a large diamond, so great a rarity it is. No actor, no dancer however brazen, would have indulged in the mildest practical joke at the expense of either Pons or Schmucke.

Pons very occasionally put in an appearance in the *foyer*; but all that Schmucke knew of the theatre was the underground passage from the street door to the orchestra. Sometimes,

however, during an interval, the good German would venture to make a survey of the house and ask a few questions of the first flute, a young fellow from Strasbourg, who came of a German family at Kehl. Gradually under the flute's tuition Schmucke's childlike imagination acquired a certain amount of knowledge of the world; he could believe in the existence of that fabulous creature the *lorette*, the possibility of "marriages at the Thirteenth Arrondissement," the vagaries of the leading lady, and the contraband traffic carried on by box-openers. In his eyes the more harmless forms of vice were the lowest depths of Babylonish iniquity; he did not believe the stories, he smiled at them for grotesque inventions. The ingenious reader can see that Pons and Schmucke were exploited, to use a word much in fashion; but what they lost in money they gained in consideration and kindly treatment.

It was after the success of the ballet with which a run of success began for the Gaudissart Company that the management presented Pons with a piece of plate – a group of figures attributed to Benvenuto Cellini. The alarming costliness of the gift caused talk in the green-room. It was a matter of twelve hundred francs! Pons, poor honest soul, was for returning the present, and Gaudissart had a world of trouble to persuade him to keep it.

"Ah!" said the manager afterwards, when he told his partner of the interview, "if we could only find actors up to that sample."

In their joint life, outwardly so quiet, there was the one

disturbing element – the weakness to which Pons sacrificed, the insatiable craving to dine out. Whenever Schmucke happened to be at home while Pons was dressing for the evening, the good German would bewail this deplorable habit.

"Gif only he vas ony fatter vor it!" he many a time cried.

And Schmucke would dream of curing his friend of his degrading vice, for a true friend's instinct in all that belongs to the inner life is unerring as a dog's sense of smell; a friend knows by intuition the trouble in his friend's soul, and guesses at the cause and ponders it in his heart.

Pons, who always wore a diamond ring on the little finger of his right hand, an ornament permitted in the time of the Empire, but ridiculous to-day – Pons, who belonged to the "troubadour time," the sentimental periods of the first Empire, was too much a child of his age, too much of a Frenchman to wear the expression of divine serenity which softened Schmucke's hideous ugliness. From Pons' melancholy looks Schmucke knew that the profession of parasite was growing daily more difficult and painful. And, in fact, in that month of October 1844, the number of houses at which Pons dined was naturally much restricted; reduced to move round and round the family circle, he had used the word family in far too wide a sense, as will shortly be seen.

M. Camusot, the rich silk mercer of the Rue des Bourdonnais, had married Pons' first cousin, Mlle. Pons, only child and heiress of one of the well-known firm of Pons Brothers, court embroiderers. Pons' own father and mother retired from a firm

founded before the Revolution of 1789, leaving their capital in the business until Mlle. Pons' father sold it in 1815 to M. Rivet. M. Camusot had since lost his wife and married again, and retired from business some ten years, and now in 1844 he was a member of the Board of Trade, a deputy, and what not. But the Camusot clan were friendly; and Pons, good man, still considered that he was some kind of cousin to the children of the second marriage, who were not relations, or even connected with him in any way.

The second Mme. Camusot being a Mlle. Cardot, Pons introduced himself as a relative into the tolerably numerous Cardot family, a second bourgeois tribe which, taken with its connections, formed quite as strong a clan as the Camusots; for Cardot the notary (brother of the second Mme. Camusot) had married a Mlle. Chiffreville; and the well-known family of Chiffreville, the leading firm of manufacturing chemists, was closely connected with the whole drug trade, of which M. Anselme Popinot was for many years the undisputed head, until the Revolution of July plunged him into the very centre of the dynastic movement, as everybody knows. So Pons, in the wake of the Camusots and Cardots, reached the Chiffrevilles, and thence the Popinots, always in the character of a cousin's cousin.

The above concise statement of Pons' relations with his entertainers explains how it came to pass that an old musician was received in 1844 as one of the family in the houses of four distinguished persons – to wit, M. le Comte Popinot, peer of

France, and twice in office; M. Cardot, retired notary, mayor and deputy of an arrondissement in Paris; M. Camusot senior, a member of the Board of Trade and the Municipal Chamber and a peerage; and lastly, M. Camusot de Marville, Camusot's son by his first marriage, and Pons' one genuine relation, albeit even he was a first cousin once removed.

This Camusot, President of a Chamber of the Court of Appeal in Paris, had taken the name of his estate at Marville to distinguish himself from his father and a younger half brother.

Cardot the retired notary had married his daughter to his successor, whose name was Berthier; and Pons, transferred as part of the connection, acquired a right to dine with the Berthiers "in the presence of a notary," as he put it.

This was the bourgeois empyrean which Pons called his "family," that upper world in which he so painfully reserved his right to a knife and fork.

Of all these houses, some ten in all, the one in which Pons ought to have met with the kindest reception should by rights have been his own cousin's; and, indeed, he paid most attention to President Camusot's family. But, alas! Mme. Camusot de Marville, daughter of the Sieur Thirion, usher of the cabinet to Louis XVIII. and Charles X., had never taken very kindly to her husband's first cousin, once removed. Pons had tried to soften this formidable relative; he wasted his time; for in spite of the pianoforte lessons which he gave gratuitously to Mlle. Camusot, a young woman with hair somewhat inclined to red, it

was impossible to make a musician of her.

And now, at this very moment, as he walked with that precious object in his hand, Pons was bound for the President's house, where he always felt as if he were at the Tuileries itself, so heavily did the solemn green curtains, the carmelite-brown hangings, thick piled carpets, heavy furniture, and general atmosphere of magisterial severity oppress his soul. Strange as it may seem, he felt more at home in the Hotel Popinot, Rue Basse-du-Rempart, probably because it was full of works of art; for the master of the house, since he entered public life, had acquired a mania for collecting beautiful things, by way of contrast no doubt, for a politician is obliged to pay for secret services of the ugliest kind.

President de Marville lived in the Rue de Hanovre, in a house which his wife had bought ten years previously, on the death of her parents, for the Sieur and Dame Thirion left their daughter about a hundred and fifty thousand francs, the savings of a lifetime. With its north aspect, the house looks gloomy enough seen from the street, but the back looks towards the south over the courtyard, with a rather pretty garden beyond it. As the President occupied the whole of the first floor, once the abode of a great financier of the time of Louis XIV., and the second was let to a wealthy old lady, the house wore a look of dignified repose befitting a magistrate's residence. President Camusot had invested all that he inherited from his mother, together with the savings of twenty years, in the purchase of the splendid Marville estate; a chateau (as fine a relic of the past as you will find to-day

in Normandy) standing in a hundred acres of park land, and a fine dependent farm, nominally bringing in twelve thousand francs per annum, though, as it cost the President at least a thousand crowns to keep up a state almost princely in our days, his yearly revenue, "all told," as the saying is, was a bare nine thousand francs. With this and his salary, the President's income amounted to about twenty thousand francs; but though to all appearance a wealthy man, especially as one-half of his father's property would one day revert to him as the only child of the first marriage, he was obliged to live in Paris as befitted his official position, and M. and Mme. de Marville spent almost the whole of their incomes. Indeed, before the year 1834 they felt pinched.

This family schedule sufficiently explains why Mlle. de Marville, aged three-and-twenty, was still unwed, in spite of a hundred thousand francs of dowry and tempting prospects, frequently, skilfully, but so far vainly, held out. For the past five years Pons had listened to Mme. la Presidente's lamentations as she beheld one young lawyer after another led to the altar, while all the newly appointed judges at the Tribunal were fathers of families already; and she, all this time, had displayed Mlle. de Marville's brilliant expectations before the undazzled eyes of young Vicomte Popinot, eldest son of the great man of the drug trade, he of whom it was said by the envious tongues of the neighborhood of the Rue des Lombards, that the Revolution of July had been brought about at least as much for his particular benefit as for the sake of the Orleans branch.

Arrived at the corner of the Rue de Choiseul and the Rue de Hanovre, Pons suffered from the inexplicable emotions which torment clear consciences; for a panic terror such as the worst of scoundrels might feel at sight of a policeman, an agony caused solely by a doubt as to Mme. de Marville's probable reception of him. That grain of sand, grating continually on the fibres of his heart, so far from losing its angles, grew more and more jagged, and the family in the Rue de Hanovre always sharpened the edges. Indeed, their unceremonious treatment and Pons' depreciation in value among them had affected the servants; and while they did not exactly fail in respect, they looked on the poor relation as a kind of beggar.

Pons' arch-enemy in the house was the ladies'-maid, a thin and wizened spinster, Madeleine Vivet by name. This Madeleine, in spite of, nay, perhaps on the strength of, a pimpled complexion and a viper-like length of spine, had made up her mind that some day she would be Mme. Pons. But in vain she dangled twenty thousand francs of savings before the old bachelor's eyes; Pons had declined happiness accompanied by so many pimples. From that time forth the Dido of the ante-chamber, who fain had called her master and mistress "cousin," wreaked her spite in petty ways upon the poor musician. She heard him on the stairs, and cried audibly, "Oh! here comes the sponger!" She stinted him of wine when she waited at dinner in the footman's absence; she filled the water-glass to the brim, to give him the difficult task of lifting it without spilling a drop; or she would pass the old man over

altogether, till the mistress of the house would remind her (and in what a tone! – it brought the color to the poor cousin's face); or she would spill the gravy over his clothes. In short, she waged petty war after the manner of a petty nature, knowing that she could annoy an unfortunate superior with impunity.

Madeleine Vivet was Mme. de Marville's maid and housekeeper. She had lived with M. and Mme. Camusot de Marville since their marriage; she had shared the early struggles in the provinces when M. Camusot was a judge at Alencon; she had helped them to exist when M. Camusot, President of the Tribunal of Mantes, came to Paris, in 1828, to be an examining magistrate. She was, therefore, too much one of the family not to wish, for reasons of her own, to revenge herself upon them. Beneath her desire to pay a trick upon her haughty and ambitious mistress, and to call her master her cousin, there surely lurked a long-stifled hatred, built up like an avalanche, upon the pebble of some past grievance.

"Here comes your M. Pons, madame, still wearing that spencer of his!" Madeleine came to tell the Presidente. "He really might tell me how he manages to make it look the same for five-and-twenty years together."

Mme. Camusot de Marville, hearing a man's footstep in the little drawing-room between the large drawing-room and her bedroom, looked at her daughter and shrugged her shoulders.

"You always make these announcements so cleverly that you leave me no time to think, Madeleine."

"Jean is out, madame, I was all alone; M. Pons rang the bell, I opened the door; and as he is almost one of the family, I could not prevent him from coming after me. There he is, taking off his spencer."

"Poor little puss!" said the Presidente, addressing her daughter, "we are caught. We shall have to dine at home now. – Let us see," she added, seeing that the "dear puss" wore a piteous face; "must we get rid of him for good?"

"Oh! poor man!" cried Mlle. Camusot, "deprive him of one of his dinners?"

Somebody coughed significantly in the next room by way of warning that he could hear.

"Very well, let him come in!" said Mme. Camusot, looking at Madeleine with another shrug.

"You are here so early, cousin, that you have come in upon us just as mother was about to dress," said Cecile Camusot in a coaxing tone. But Cousin Pons had caught sight of the Presidente's shrug, and felt so cruelly hurt that he could not find a compliment, and contented himself with the profound remark, "You are always charming, my little cousin."

Then, turning to the mother, he continued with a bow:

"You will not take it amiss, I think, if I have come a little earlier than usual, dear cousin; I have brought something for you; you once did me the pleasure of asking me for it."

Poor Pons! Every time he addressed the President, the President's wife, or Cecile as "cousin," he gave them excruciating

annoyance. As he spoke, he draw a long, narrow cherry-wood box, marvelously carved, from his coat-pocket.

"Oh, did I? – I had forgotten," the lady answered drily.

It was a heartless speech, was it not? Did not those few words deny all merit to the pains taken for her by the cousin whose one offence lay in the fact that he was a poor relation?

"But it is very kind of you, cousin," she added. "How much to I owe you for this little trifle?"

Pons quivered inwardly at the question. He had meant the trinket as a return for his dinners.

"I thought that you would permit me to offer it you – " he faltered out.

"What?" said Mme. Camusot. "Oh! but there need be no ceremony between us; we know each other well enough to wash our linen among ourselves. I know very well that you are not rich enough to give more than you get. And to go no further, it is quite enough that you should have spent a good deal of time in running among the dealers – "

"If you were asked to pay the full price of the fan, my dear cousin, you would not care to have it," answered poor Pons, hurt and insulted; "it is one of Watteau's masterpieces, painted on both sides; but you may be quite easy, cousin, I did not give one-hundredth part of its value as a work of art."

To tell a rich man that he is poor! you might as well tell the Archbishop of Granada that his homilies show signs of senility. Mme. la Presidente, proud of her husband's position,

of the estate of Marville, and her invitations to court balls, was keenly susceptible on this point; and what was worse, the remark came from a poverty-stricken musician to whom she had been charitable.

"Then the people of whom you buy things of this kind are very stupid, are they?" she asked quickly.

"Stupid dealers are unknown in Paris," Pons answered almost drily.

"Then you must be very clever," put in Cecile by way of calming the dispute.

"Clever enough to know a Lancret, a Watteau, a Pater, or Greuze when I see it, little cousin; but anxious, most of all, to please your dear mamma."

Mme. de Marville, ignorant and vain, was unwilling to appear to receive the slightest trifle from the parasite; and here her ignorance served her admirably, she did not even know the name of Watteau. And, on the other hand, if anything can measure the extent of the collector's passion, which, in truth, is one of the most deeply seated of all passions, rivaling the very vanity of the author – if anything can give an idea of the lengths to which a collector will go, it is the audacity which Pons displayed on this occasion, as he held his own against his lady cousin for the first time in twenty years. He was amazed at his own boldness. He made Cecile see the beauties of the delicate carving on the sticks of this wonder, and as he talked to her his face grew serene and gentle again. But without some sketch of the Presidente, it

is impossible fully to understand the perturbation of heart from which Pons suffered.

Mme. de Marville had been short and fair, plump and fresh; at forty-six she was as short as ever, but she looked dried up. An arched forehead and thin lips, that had been softly colored once, lent a soured look to a face naturally disdainful, and now grown hard and unpleasant with a long course of absolute domestic rule. Time had deepened her fair hair to a harsh chestnut hue; the pride of office, intensified by suppressed envy, looked out of eyes that had lost none of their brightness nor their satirical expression. As a matter of fact, Mme. Camusot de Marville felt almost poor in the society of self-made wealthy bourgeois with whom Pons dined. She could not forgive the rich retail druggist, ex-president of the Commercial Court, for his successive elevations as deputy, member of the Government, count and peer of France. She could not forgive her father-in-law for putting himself forward instead of his eldest son as deputy of his arrondissement after Popinot's promotion to the peerage. After eighteen years of services in Paris, she was still waiting for the post of Councillor of the Court of Cassation for her husband. It was Camusot's own incompetence, well known at the Law Courts, which excluded him from the Council. The Home Secretary of 1844 even regretted Camusot's nomination to the presidency of the Court of Indictments in 1834, though, thanks to his past experience as an examining magistrate, he made himself useful in drafting decrees.

These disappointments had told upon Mme. de Marville, who, moreover, had formed a tolerably correct estimate of her husband. A temper naturally shrewish was soured till she grew positively terrible. She was not old, but she had aged; she deliberately set herself to extort by fear all that the world was inclined to refuse her, and was harsh and rasping as a file. Caustic to excess she had few friends among women; she surrounded herself with prim, elderly matrons of her own stamp, who lent each other mutual support, and people stood in awe of her. As for poor Pons, his relations with this fiend in petticoats were very much those of a schoolboy with the master whose one idea of communication is the ferule.

The Presidente had no idea of the value of the gift. She was puzzled by her cousin's sudden access of audacity.

"Then, where did you find this?" inquired Cecile, as she looked closely at the trinket.

"In the Rue de Lappe. A dealer in second-hand furniture there had just brought it back with him from a chateau that is being pulled down near Dreux, Aulnay. Mme. de Pompadour used to spend part of her time there before she built Menars. Some of the most splendid wood-carving ever known has been saved from destruction; Lienard (our most famous living wood-carver) had kept a couple of oval frames for models, as the *ne plus ultra* of the art, so fine it is. – There were treasures in that place. My man found the fan in the drawer of an inlaid what-not, which I should certainly have bought if I were collecting things of the kind, but it

is quite out of the question – a single piece of Riesener's furniture is worth three or four thousand francs! People here in Paris are just beginning to find out that the famous French and German marquetry workers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries composed perfect pictures in wood. It is a collector's business to be ahead of the fashion. Why, in five years' time, the Frankenthal ware, which I have been collecting these twenty years, will fetch twice the price of Sevres *pata tendre*."

"What is Frankenthal ware?" asked Cecile.

"That is the name of the porcelain made by the Elector of the Palatinate; it dates further back than our manufactory at Sevres; just as the famous gardens at Heidelberg, laid waste by Turenne, had the bad luck to exist before the garden of Versailles. Sevres copied Frankenthal to a large extent. – In justice to the Germans, it must be said that they have done admirable work in Saxony and in the Palatinate."

Mother and daughter looked at one another as if Pons were speaking Chinese. No one can imagine how ignorant and exclusive Parisians are; they only learn what they are taught, and that only when they choose.

"And how do you know the Frankenthal ware when you see it?"

"Eh! by the mark!" cried Pons with enthusiasm. "There is a mark on every one of those exquisite masterpieces. Frankenthal ware is marked with a C and T (for Charles Theodore) interlaced and crowned. On old Dresden china there are two crossed swords

and the number of the order in gilt figures. Vincennes bears a hunting-horn; Vienna, a V closed and barred. You can tell Berlin by the two bars, Mayence by the wheel, and Sevres by the two crossed L's. The queen's porcelain is marked A for Antoinette, with a royal crown above it. In the eighteenth century, all the crowned heads of Europe had rival porcelain factories, and workmen were kidnaped. Watteau designed services for the Dresden factory; they fetch frantic prices at the present day. One has to know what one is about with them too, for they are turning out imitations now at Dresden. Wonderful things they used to make; they will never make the like again – "

"Oh! pshaw!"

"No, cousin. Some inlaid work and some kinds of porcelain will never be made again, just as there will never be another Raphael, nor Titian, nor Rembrandt, nor Van Eyck, nor Cranach… Well, now! there are the Chinese; they are very ingenious, very clever; they make modern copies of their 'grand mandarin' porcelain, as it is called. But a pair of vases of genuine 'grand mandarin' vases of the largest size, are worth, six, eight, and ten thousand francs, while you can buy the modern replicas for a couple of hundred!"

"You are joking."

"You are astonished at the prices, but that is nothing, cousin. A dinner service of Sevres *pate tendre* (and *pate tendre* is not porcelain) – a complete dinner service of Sevres *pate tendre* for twelve persons is not merely worth a hundred thousand francs,

but that is the price charged on the invoice. Such a dinner-service cost fifteen thousand francs at Sevres in 1750; I have seen the original invoices."

"But let us go back to this fan," said Cecile. Evidently in her opinion the trinket was an old-fashioned thing.

"You can understand that as soon as your dear mamma did me the honor of asking for a fan, I went round of all the curiosity shops in Paris, but I found nothing fine enough. I wanted nothing less than a masterpiece for the dear Presidente, and thought of giving her one that once belonged to Marie Antoinette, the most beautiful of all celebrated fans. But yesterday I was dazzled by this divine *chef-d'oeuvre*, which certainly must have been ordered by Louis XV. himself. Do you ask how I came to look for fans in the Rue de Lappe, among an Auvergnat's stock of brass and iron and ormolu furniture? Well, I myself believe that there is an intelligence in works of art; they know art-lovers, they call to them – 'Cht-tt!'"

Mme. de Marville shrugged her shoulders and looked at her daughter; Pons did not notice the rapid pantomime.

"I know all those sharpers," continued Pons, "so I asked him, 'Anything fresh to-day, Daddy Monistrol?' – (for he always lets me look over his lots before the big buyers come) – and at that he began to tell me how Lienard, that did such beautiful work for the Government in the Chapelle de Dreux, had been at the Aulnay sale and rescued the carved panels out of the clutches of the Paris dealers, while their heads were running on china and

inlaid furniture. – 'I did not do much myself,' he went on, 'but I may make my traveling expenses out of *this*,' and he showed me a what-not; a marvel! Boucher's designs executed in marquetry, and with such art! – One could have gone down on one's knees before it. – 'Look, sir,' he said, 'I have just found this fan in a little drawer; it was locked, I had to force it open. You might tell me where I can sell it' – and with that he brings out this little carved cherry-wood box. – 'See,' says he, 'it is the kind of Pompadour that looks like decorated Gothic.' – 'Yes,' I told him, 'the box is pretty; the box might suit me; but as for the fan, Monistrol, I have no Mme. Pons to give the old trinket to, and they make very pretty new ones nowadays; you can buy miracles of painting on vellum cheaply enough. There are two thousand painters in Paris, you know.' – And I opened out the fan carelessly, keeping down my admiration, looked indifferently at those two exquisite little pictures, touched off with an ease fit to send you into raptures. I held Mme. de Pompadour's fan in my hand! Watteau had done his utmost for this. – 'What do you want for the what-not?' – 'Oh! a thousand francs; I have had a bid already.' – I offered him a price for the fan corresponding with the probable expenses of the journey. We looked each other in the eyes, and I saw that I had my man. I put the fan back into the box lest my Auvergnat should begin to look at it, and went into ecstasies over the box; indeed, it is a jewel. – 'If I take it,' said I, 'it is for the sake of the box; the box tempts me. As for the what-not, you will get more than a thousand francs for that. Just see how the brass is wrought;

it is a model. There is business in it… It has never been copied; it is a unique specimen, made solely for Mme. de Pompadour' – and so on, till my man, all on fire for his what-not, forgets the fan, and lets me have it for a mere trifle, because I have pointed out the beauties of his piece of Riesener's furniture. So here it is; but it needs a great deal of experience to make such a bargain as that. It is a duel, eye to eye; and who has such eyes as a Jew or an Auvergnat?"

The old artist's wonderful pantomime, his vivid, eager way of telling the story of the triumph of his shrewdness over the dealer's ignorance, would have made a subject for a Dutch painter; but it was all thrown away upon the audience. Mother and daughter exchanged cold, contemptuous glances. – "What an oddity!" they seemed to say.

"So it amuses you?" remarked Mme. de Marville. The question sent a cold chill through Pons; he felt a strong desire to slap the Presidente.

"Why, my dear cousin, that is the way to hunt down a work of art. You are face to face with antagonists that dispute the game with you. It is craft against craft! A work of art in the hands of a Norman, an Auvergnat, or a Jew, is like a princess guarded by magicians in a fairy tale."

"And how can you tell that this is by Wat – what do you call him?"

"Watteau, cousin. One of the greatest eighteenth century painters in France. Look! do you not see that it is his

work?" (pointing to a pastoral scene, court-shepherd swains and shepherdesses dancing in a ring). "The movement! the life in it! the coloring! There it is – see! – painted with a stroke of the brush, as a writing-master makes a flourish with a pen. Not a trace of effort here! And, turn it over, look! – a ball in a drawing-room. Summer and Winter! And what ornaments! and how well preserved it is! The hinge-pin is gold, you see, and on cleaning it, I found a tiny ruby at either side."

"If it is so, cousin, I could not think of accepting such a valuable present from you. It would be better to lay up the money for yourself," said Mme. de Marville; but all the same, she asked no better than to keep the splendid fan.

"It is time that it should pass from the service of Vice into the hands of Virtue," said the good soul, recovering his assurance. "It has taken a century to work the miracle. No princess at Court, you may be sure, will have anything to compare with it; for, unfortunately, men will do more for a Pompadour than for a virtuous queen, such is human nature."

"Very well," Mme. de Marville said, laughing, "I will accept your present. – Cecile, my angel, go to Madeleine and see that dinner is worthy of your cousin."

Mme. de Marville wished to make matters even. Her request, made aloud, in defiance of all rules of good taste, sounded so much like an attempt to repay at once the balance due to the poor cousin, that Pons flushed red, like a girl found out in fault. The grain of sand was a little too large; for some moments he could

only let it work in his heart. Cecile, a red-haired young woman, with a touch of pedantic affectation, combined her father's ponderous manner with a trace of her mother's hardness. She went and left poor Pons face to face with the terrible Presidente.

"How nice she is, my little Lili!" said the mother. She still called her Cecile by this baby name.

"Charming!" said Pons, twirling his thumbs.

"I *cannot* understand these times in which we live," broke out the Presidente. "What is the good of having a President of the Court of Appeal in Paris and a Commander of the Legion of Honor for your father, and for a grandfather the richest wholesale silk merchant in Paris, a deputy, and a millionaire that will be a peer of France some of these days?"

The President's zeal for the new Government had, in fact, recently been rewarded with a commander's ribbon – thanks to his friendship with Popinot, said the envious. Popinot himself, modest though he was, had, as has been seen, accepted the title of count, "for his son's sake," he told his numerous friends.

"Men look for nothing but money nowadays," said Cousin Pons. "No one thinks anything of you unless you are rich, and – "

"What would it have been if Heaven had spared my poor little Charles! – " cried the lady.

"Oh, with two children you would be poor," returned the cousin. "It practically means the division of the property. But you need not trouble yourself, cousin; Cecile is sure to marry sooner or later. She is the most accomplished girl I know."

To such depths had Pons fallen by adapting himself to the company of his entertainers! In their houses he echoed their ideas, and said the obvious thing, after the manner of a chorus in a Greek play. He did not dare to give free play to the artist's originality, which had overflowed in bright repartee when he was young; he had effaced himself, till he had almost lost his individuality; and if the real Pons appeared, as he had done a moment ago, he was immediately repressed.

"But I myself was married with only twenty thousand francs for my portion – "

"In 1819, cousin. And it was *you*, a woman with a head on your shoulders, and the royal protection of Louis XVIII."

"Be still, my child is a perfect angel. She is clever, she has a warm heart, she will have a hundred thousand francs on her wedding day, to say nothing of the most brilliant expectations; and yet she stays on our hands," and so on and so on. For twenty minutes, Mme. de Marville talked on about herself and her Cecile, pitying herself after the manner of mothers in bondage to marriageable daughters.

Pons had dined at the house every week for twenty years, and Camusot de Marville was the only cousin he had in the world; but he had yet to hear the first word spoken as to his own affairs – nobody cared to know how he lived. Here and elsewhere the poor cousin was a kind of sink down which his relatives poured domestic confidences. His discretion was well known; indeed, was he not bound over to silence when a single imprudent word

would have shut the door of ten houses upon him? And he must combine his role of listener with a second part; he must applaud continually, smile on every one, accuse nobody, defend nobody; from his point of view, every one must be in the right. And so, in the house of his kinsman, Pons no longer counted as a man; he was a digestive apparatus.

In the course of a long tirade, Mme. Camusot de Marville avowed with due circumspection that she was prepared to take almost any son-in-law with her eyes shut. She was even disposed to think that at eight-and-forty or so a man with twenty thousand francs a year was a good match.

"Cecile is in her twenty-third year. If it should fall out so unfortunately that she is not married before she is five or six-and-twenty, it will be extremely hard to marry her at all. When a girl reaches that age, people want to know why she has been so long on hand. We are a good deal talked about in our set. We have come to the end of all the ordinary excuses – 'She is so young. – She is so fond of her father and mother that she doesn't like to leave them. – She is so happy at home. – She is hard to please, she would like a good name – ' We are beginning to look silly; I feel that distinctly. And besides, Cecile is tired of waiting, poor child, she suffers – "

"In what way?" Pons was noodle enough to ask.

"Why, because it is humiliating to her to see all her girl friends married before her," replied the mother, with a duenna's air.

"But, cousin, has anything happened since the last time that

I had the pleasure of dining here? Why do you think of men of eight-and-forty?" Pons inquired humbly.

"This has happened," returned the Presidente. "We were to have had an interview with a Court Councillor; his son is thirty years old and very well-to-do, and M. de Marville would have obtained a post in the audit-office for him and paid the money. The young man is a supernumerary there at present. And now they tell us that he has taken it into his head to rush off to Italy in the train of a duchess from the Bal Mabille… It is nothing but a refusal in disguise. The fact is, the young man's mother is dead; he has an income of thirty thousand francs, and more to come at his father's death, and they don't care about the match for him. You have just come in in the middle of all this, dear cousin, so you must excuse our bad temper."

While Pons was casting about for the complimentary answer which invariably occurred to him too late when he was afraid of his host, Madeleine came in, handed a folded note to the Presidente, and waited for an answer. The note ran as follows:

> "DEAR MAMMA, – If we pretend that this note comes to you from papa at the Palais, and that he wants us both to dine with his friend because proposals have been renewed – then the cousin will go, and we can carry out our plan of going to the Popinots."

"Who brought the master's note?" the Presidente asked quickly.

"A lad from the Salle du Palais," the withered waiting woman

unblushingly answered, and her mistress knew at once that Madeleine had woven the plot with Cecile, now at the end of her patience.

"Tell him that we will both be there at half-past five."

Madeleine had no sooner left the room than the Presidente turned to Cousin Pons with that insincere friendliness which is about as grateful to a sensitive soul as a mixture of milk and vinegar to the palate of an epicure.

"Dinner is ordered, dear cousin; you must dine without us; my husband has just sent word from the court that the question of the marriage has been reopened, and we are to dine with the Councillor. We need not stand on ceremony at all. Do just as if you were at home. I have no secrets from you; I am perfectly open with you, as you see. I am sure you would not wish to break off the little darling's marriage."

"*I*, cousin? On the contrary, I should like to find some one for her; but in my circle – "

"Oh, that is not at all likely," said the Presidente, cutting him short insolently. "Then you will stay, will you not? Cecile will keep you company while I dress.

"Oh! I can dine somewhere else, cousin."

Cruelly hurt though he was by her way of casting up his poverty to him, the prospect of being left alone with the servants was even more alarming.

"But why should you? Dinner is ready; you may just as well have it; if you do not, the servants will eat it."

At that atrocious speech Pons started up as if he had received a shock from a galvanic battery, bowed stiffly to the lady, and went to find his spencer. Now, it so happened that the door of Cecile's bedroom, beyond the little drawing-room, stood open, and looking into the mirror, he caught sight of the girl shaking with laughter as she gesticulated and made signs to her mother. The old artist understood beyond a doubt that he had been the victim of some cowardly hoax. Pons went slowly down the stairs; he could not keep back the tears. He understood that he had been turned out of the house, but why and wherefore he did not know.

"I am growing too old," he told himself. "The world has a horror of old age and poverty – two ugly things. After this I will not go anywhere unless I am asked."

Heroic resolve!

Downstairs the great gate was shut, as it usually is in houses occupied by the proprietor; the kitchen stood exactly opposite the porter's lodge, and the door was open. Pons was obliged to listen while Madeleine told the servants the whole story amid the laughter of the servants. She had not expected him to leave so soon. The footman loudly applauded a joke at the expense of a visitor who was always coming to the house and never gave you more than three francs at the year's end.

"Yes," put in the cook; "but if he cuts up rough and does not come back, there will be three francs the less for some of us on New Year's day."

"Eh! How is he to know?" retorted the footman.

"Pooh!" said Madeleine, "a little sooner or a little later – what difference does it make? The people at the other houses where he dines are so tired of him that they are going to turn him out."

"The gate, if you please!"

Madeleine had scarcely uttered the words when they heard the old musician's call to the porter. It sounded like a cry of pain. There was a sudden silence in the kitchen.

"He heard!" the footman said.

"Well, and if he did, so much the worser, or rather so much the better," retorted Madeleine. "He is an arrant skinflint."

Poor Pons had lost none of the talk in the kitchen; he heard it all, even to the last word. He made his way home along the boulevards, in the same state, physical and mental, as an old woman after a desperate struggle with burglars. As he went he talked to himself in quick spasmodic jerks; his honor had been wounded, and the pain of it drove him on as a gust of wind whirls away a straw. He found himself at last in the Boulevard du Temple; how he had come thither he could not tell. It was five o'clock, and, strange to say, he had completely lost his appetite.

But if the reader is to understand the revolution which Pons' unexpected return at that hour was to work in the Rue de Normandie, the promised biography of Mme. Cibot must be given in this place.

Any one passing along the Rue de Normandie might be pardoned for thinking that he was in some small provincial town. Grass runs to seed in the street, everybody knows everybody else,

and the sight of a stranger is an event. The houses date back to the reign of Henry IV., when there was a scheme afoot for a quarter in which every street was to be named after a French province, and all should converge in a handsome square to which La France should stand godmother. The Quartier de l'Europe was a revival of the same idea; history repeats itself everywhere in the world, and even in the world of speculation.

The house in which the two musicians used to live is an old mansion with a courtyard in front and a garden at the back; but the front part of the house which gives upon the street is comparatively modern, built during the eighteenth century when the Marais was a fashionable quarter. The friends lived at the back, on the second floor of the old part of the house. The whole building belongs to M. Pillerault, an old man of eighty, who left matters very much in the hands of M. and Mme. Cibot, his porters for the past twenty-six years.

Now, as a porter cannot live by his lodge alone, the aforesaid Cibot had other means of gaining a livelihood; and supplemented his five per cent on the rental and his faggot from every cartload of wood by his own earnings as a tailor. In time Cibot ceased to work for the master tailors; he made a connection among the little trades-people of the quarter, and enjoyed a monopoly of the repairs, renovations, and fine drawing of all the coats and trousers in three adjacent streets. The lodge was spacious and wholesome, and boasted a second room; wherefore the Cibot couple were looked upon as among the luckiest porters in the

arrondissement.

Cibot, small and stunted, with a complexion almost olive-colored by reason of sitting day in day out in Turk-fashion on a table level with the barred window, made about twelve or fourteen francs a week. He worked still, though he was fifty-eight years old, but fifty-eight is the porter's golden age; he is used to his lodge, he and his room fit each other like the shell and the oyster, and "he is known in the neighborhood."

Mme. Cibot, sometime opener of oysters at the *Cadran Bleu*, after all the adventures which come unsought to the belle of an oyster-bar, left her post for love of Cibot at the age of twenty-eight. The beauty of a woman of the people is short-lived, especially if she is planted espalier fashion at a restaurant door. Her features are hardened by puffs of hot air from the kitchen; the color of the heeltaps of customers' bottles, finished in the company of the waiters, gradually filters into her complexion – no beauty is full blown so soon as the beauty of an oyster-opener. Luckily for Mme. Cibot, lawful wedlock and a portress' life were offered to her just in time; while she still preserved a comeliness of a masculine order slandered by rivals of the Rue de Normandie, who called her "a great blowsy thing," Mme. Cibot might have sat as a model to Rubens. Those flesh tints reminded you of the appetizing sheen on a pat of Isigny butter; but plump as she was, no woman went about her work with more agility. Mme. Cibot had attained the time of life when women of her stamp are obliged to shave – which is as much as to say that she had reached

the age of forty-eight. A porter's wife with a moustache is one of the best possible guarantees of respectability and security that a landlord can have. If Delacroix could have seen Mme. Cibot leaning proudly on her broom handle, he would assuredly have painted her as Bellona.

Strange as it may seem, the circumstances of the Cibots, man and wife (in the style of an indictment), were one day to affect the lives of the two friends; wherefore the chronicler, as in duty bound, must give some particulars as to the Cibots' lodge.

The house brought in about eight thousand francs for there were three complete sets of apartments – back and front, on the side nearest the Rue de Normandie, as well as the three floors in the older mansion between the courtyard and the garden, and a shop kept by a marine store-dealer named Remonencq, which fronted on the street. During the past few months this Remonencq had begun to deal in old curiosities, and knew the value of Pons' collection so well that he took off his hat whenever the musician came in or went out.

A sou in the livre on eight thousand francs therefore brought in about four hundred francs to the Cibots. They had no rent to pay and no expenses for firing; Cibot's earnings amounted on an average to seven or eight hundred francs, add tips at New Year, and the pair had altogether in income of sixteen hundred francs, every penny of which they spent, for the Cibots lived and fared better than working people usually do. "One can only live once," La Cibot used to say. She was born during the Revolution, you

see, and had never learned her Catechism.

The husband of this portress with the unblenching tawny eyes was an object of envy to the whole fraternity, for La Cibot had not forgotten the knowledge of cookery picked up at the *Cadran Bleu*. So it had come to pass that the Cibots had passed the prime of life, and saw themselves on the threshold of old age without a hundred francs put by for the future. Well clad and well fed, they enjoyed among the neighbors, it is true, the respect due to twenty-six years of strict honesty; for if they had nothing of their own, they "hadn't nothing belonging to nobody else," according to La Cibot, who was a prodigal of negatives. "There wasn't never such a love of a man," she would say to her husband. Do you ask why? You might as well ask the reason of her indifference in matters of religion.

Both of them were proud of a life lived in open day, of the esteem in which they were held for six or seven streets round about, and of the autocratic rule permitted to them by the proprietor ("perprietor," they called him); but in private they groaned because they had no money lying at interest. Cibot complained of pains in his hands and legs, and his wife would lament that her poor, dear Cibot should be forced to work at his age; and, indeed, the day is not far distant when a porter after thirty years of such a life will cry shame upon the injustice of the Government and clamor for the ribbon of the Legion of Honor. Every time that the gossip of the quarter brought news of such and such a servant-maid, left an annuity of three or four

hundred francs after eight or ten years of service, the porters' lodges would resound with complaints, which may give some idea of the consuming jealousies in the lowest walks of life in Paris.

"Oh, indeed! It will never happen to the like of us to have our names mentioned in a will! We have no luck, but we do more than servants, for all that. We fill a place of trust; we give receipts, we are on the lookout for squalls, and yet we are treated like dogs, neither more nor less, and that's the truth!"

"Some find fortune and some miss fortune," said Cibot, coming in with a coat.

"If I had left Cibot here in his lodge and taken a place as cook, we should have our thirty thousand francs out at interest," cried Mme. Cibot, standing chatting with a neighbor, her hands on her prominent hips. "But I didn't understand how to get on in life; housed inside of a snug lodge and firing found and want for nothing, but that is all."

In 1836, when the friends took up their abode on the second floor, they brought about a sort of revolution in the Cibot household. It befell on this wise. Schmucke, like his friend Pons, usually arranged that the porter or the porter's wife should undertake the cares of housekeeping; and being both of one mind on this point when they came to live in the Rue de Normandie, Mme. Cibot became their housekeeper at the rate of twenty-five francs per month – twelve francs fifty centimes for each of them. Before the year was out, the emeritus portress reigned

in the establishment of the two old bachelors, as she reigned everywhere in the house belonging to M. Pillerault, great uncle of Mme. le Comtesse Popinot. Their business was her business; she called them "my gentlemen." And at last, finding the pair of nutcrackers as mild as lambs, easy to live with, and by no means suspicious – perfect children, in fact – her heart, the heart of a woman of the people, prompted her to protect, adore, and serve them with such thorough devotion, that she read them a lecture now and again, and saved them from the impositions which swell the cost of living in Paris. For twenty-five francs a month, the two old bachelors inadvertently acquired a mother.

As they became aware of Mme. Cibot's full value, they gave her outspoken praises, and thanks, and little presents which strengthened the bonds of the domestic alliance. Mme. Cibot a thousand times preferred appreciation to money payments; it is a well-known fact that the sense that one is appreciated makes up for a deficiency in wages. And Cibot did all that he could for his wife's two gentlemen, and ran errands and did repairs at half-price for them.

The second year brought a new element into the friendship between the lodge and the second floor, and Schmucke concluded a bargain which satisfied his indolence and desire for a life without cares. For thirty sous per day, or forty-five francs per month, Mme. Cibot undertook to provide Schmucke with breakfast and dinner; and Pons, finding his friend's breakfast very much to his mind, concluded a separate treaty for that meal only

at the rate of eighteen francs. This arrangement, which added nearly ninety francs every month to the takings of the porter and his wife, made two inviolable beings of the lodgers; they became angels, cherubs, divinities. It is very doubtful whether the King of the French, who is supposed to understand economy, is as well served as the pair of nutcrackers used to be in those days.

For them the milk issued pure from the can; they enjoyed a free perusal of all the morning papers taken by other lodgers, later risers, who were told, if need be, that the newspapers had not come yet. Mme. Cibot, moreover, kept their clothes, their rooms, and the landing as clean as a Flemish interior. As for Schmucke, he enjoyed unhoped-for happiness; Mme. Cibot had made life easy for him; he paid her about six francs a month, and she took charge of his linen, washing, and mending. Altogether, his expenses amounted to sixty-six francs per month (for he spent fifteen francs on tobacco), and sixty-six francs multiplied by twelve produces the sum total of seven hundred and ninety-two francs. Add two hundred and twenty francs for rent, rates, and taxes, and you have a thousand and twelve francs. Cibot was Schmucke's tailor; his clothes cost him on average a hundred and fifty francs, which further swells the total to the sum of twelve hundred. On twelve hundred francs per annum this profound philosopher lived. How many people in Europe, whose one thought it is to come to Paris and live there, will be agreeably surprised to learn that you may exist in comfort upon an income of twelve hundred francs in the Rue de Normandie in the Marais,

under the wing of a Mme. Cibot.

Mme. Cibot, to resume the story, was amazed beyond expression to see Pons, good man, return at five o'clock in the evening. Such a thing had never happened before; and not only so, but "her gentleman" had given her no greeting – had not so much as seen her!

"Well, well, Cibot," said she to her spouse, "M. Pons has come in for a million, or gone out of his mind!"

"That is how it looks to me," said Cibot, dropping the coat-sleeve in which he was making a "dart," in tailor's language.

The savory odor of a stew pervaded the whole courtyard, as Pons returned mechanically home. Mme. Cibot was dishing up Schmucke's dinner, which consisted of scraps of boiled beef from a little cook-shop not above doing a little trade of this kind. These morsels were fricasseed in brown butter, with thin slices of onion, until the meat and vegetables had absorbed the gravy and this true porter's dish was browned to the right degree. With that fricassee, prepared with loving care for Cibot and Schmucke, and accompanied by a bottle of beer and a piece of cheese, the old German music-master was quite content. Not King Solomon in all his glory, be sure, could dine better than Schmucke. A dish of boiled beef fricasseed with onions, scraps of *saute* chicken, or beef and parsley, or venison, or fish served with a sauce of La Cibot's own invention (a sauce with which a mother might unsuspectingly eat her child), – such was Schmucke's ordinary, varying with the quantity and quality of the

remnants of food supplied by boulevard restaurants to the cook-shop in the Rue Boucherat. Schmucke took everything that "goot Montame Zipod" gave him, and was content, and so from day to day "goot Montame Zipod" cut down the cost of his dinner, until it could be served for twenty sous.

"It won't be long afore I find out what is the matter with him, poor dear," said Mme. Cibot to her husband, "for here is M. Schmucke's dinner all ready for him."

As she spoke she covered the deep earthenware dish with a plate; and, notwithstanding her age, she climbed the stair and reached the door before Schmucke opened it to Pons.

"Vat is de matter mit you, mein goot friend?" asked the German, scared by the expression of Pons' face.

"I will tell you all about it; but I have come home to have dinner with you – "

"Tinner! tinner!" cried Schmucke in ecstasy; "but it is impossible!" the old German added, as he thought of his friend's gastronomical tastes; and at that very moment he caught sight of Mme. Cibot listening to the conversation, as she had a right to do as his lawful housewife. Struck with one of those happy inspirations which only enlighten a friend's heart, he marched up to the portress and drew her out to the stairhead.

"Montame Zipod," he said, "der goot Pons is fond of goot dings; shoost go rount to der *Catran Pleu* und order a dainty liddle tinner, mit anjovies und maggaroni. Ein tinner for Lugullus, in vact."

"What is that?" inquired La Cibot.

"Oh! ah!" returned Schmucke, "it is veal *a la pourcheoise*" (*bourgeoise*, he meant), "a nice fisch, ein pottle off Porteaux, und nice dings, der fery best dey haf, like groquettes of rice und shmoked pacon! Bay for it, und say nodings; I vill gif you back de monny to-morrow morning."

Back went Schmucke, radiant and rubbing his hands; but his expression slowly changed to a look of bewildered astonishment as he heard Pons' story of the troubles that had but just now overwhelmed him in a moment. He tried to comfort Pons by giving him a sketch of the world from his own point of view. Paris, in his opinion, was a perpetual hurly-burly, the men and women in it were whirled away by a tempestuous waltz; it was no use expecting anything of the world, which only looked at the outsides of things, "und not at der inderior." For the hundredth time he related how that the only three pupils for whom he had really cared, for whom he was ready to die, the three who had been fond of him, and even allowed him a little pension of nine hundred francs, each contributing three hundred to the amount – his favorite pupils had quite forgotten to come to see him; and so swift was the current of Parisian life which swept them away, that if he called at their houses, he had not succeeded in seeing them once in three years – (it is a fact, however, that Schmucke had always thought fit to call on these great ladies at ten o'clock in the morning!) – still, his pension was paid quarterly through the medium of solicitors.

"Und yet, dey are hearts of gold," he concluded. "Dey are my liddle Saint Cecilias, sharming vimmen, Montame de Bordentuere, Montame de Fantenesse, und Montame du Dilet. Gif I see dem at all, it is at die Jambs Elusees, und dey do not see me… yet dey are ver' fond of me, und I might go to dine mit dem, und dey vould be ver' bleased to see me; und I might go to deir country-houses, but I vould much rader be mit mine friend Bons, because I kann see him venefer I like, und efery tay."

Pons took Schmucke's hand and grasped it between his own. All that was passing in his inmost soul was communicated in that tight pressure. And so for awhile the friends sat like two lovers, meeting at last after a long absence.

"Tine here, efery tay!" broke out Schmucke, inwardly blessing Mme. de Marville for her hardness of heart. "Look here! Ve shall go a prick-a-pracking togeders, und der teufel shall nefer show his tail here."

"Ve shall go prick-a-pracking togeders!" for the full comprehension of those truly heroic words, it must be confessed that Schmucke's ignorance of bric-a-brac was something of the densest. It required all the strength of his friendship to keep him from doing heedless damage in the sitting-room and study which did duty as a museum for Pons. Schmucke, wholly absorbed in music, a composer for love of his art, took about as much interest in his friend's little trifles as a fish might take in a flower-show at the Luxembourg, supposing that it had received a ticket of admission. A certain awe which he certainly felt for the

marvels was simply a reflection of the respect which Pons showed his treasures when he dusted them. To Pons' exclamations of admiration, he was wont to reply with a "Yes, it is ver' bretty," as a mother answers baby-gestures with meaningless baby-talk. Seven times since the friends had lived together, Pons had exchanged a good clock for a better one, till at last he possessed a timepiece in Boule's first and best manner, for Boule had two manners, as Raphael had three. In the first he combined ebony and copper; in the second – contrary to his convictions – he sacrificed to tortoise-shell inlaid work. In spite of Pons' learned dissertations, Schmucke never could see the slightest difference between the magnificent clock in Boule's first manner and its six predecessors; but, for Pons' sake, Schmucke was even more careful among the "chimcracks" than Pons himself. So it should not be surprising that Schmucke's sublime words comforted Pons in his despair; for "Ve shall go prick-a-pracking togeders," meant, being interpreted, "I will put money into bric-a-brac, if you will only dine here."

"Dinner is ready," Mme. Cibot announced, with astonishing self-possession.

It is not difficult to imagine Pons' surprise when he saw and relished the dinner due to Schmucke's friendship. Sensations of this kind, that came so rarely in a lifetime, are never the outcome of the constant, close relationship by which friend daily says to friend, "You are a second self to me"; for this, too, becomes a matter of use and wont. It is only by contact with

the barbarism of the world without that the happiness of that intimate life is revealed to us as a sudden glad surprise. It is the outer world which renews the bond between friend and friend, lover and lover, all their lives long, wherever two great souls are knit together by friendship or by love.

Pons brushed away two big tears, Schmucke himself wiped his eyes; and though nothing was said, the two were closer friends than before. Little friendly nods and glances exchanged across the table were like balm to Pons, soothing the pain caused by the sand dropped in his heart by the President's wife. As for Schmucke, he rubbed his hands till they were sore; for a new idea had occurred to him, one of those great discoveries which cause a German no surprise, unless they sprout up suddenly in a Teuton brain frost-bound by the awe and reverence due to sovereign princes.

"Mine goot Bons?" began Schmucke.

"I can guess what you mean; you would like us both to dine together here, every day – "

"Gif only I vas rich enof to lif like dis efery tay – " began the good German in a melancholy voice. But here Mme. Cibot appeared upon the scene. Pons had given her an order for the theatre from time to time, and stood in consequence almost as high in her esteem and affection as her boarder Schmucke.

"Lord love you," said she, "for three francs and wine extra I can give you both such a dinner every day that you will be ready to lick the plates as clean as if they were washed."

"It is a fact," Schmucke remarked, "dat die dinners dat Montame Zipod cooks for me are better as de messes dey eat at der royal dable!" In his eagerness, Schmucke, usually so full of respect for the powers that be, so far forgot himself as to imitate the irreverent newspapers which scoffed at the "fixed-price" dinners of Royalty.

"Really?" said Pons. "Very well, I will try to-morrow."

And at that promise Schmucke sprang from one end of the table to the other, sweeping off tablecloth, bottles, and dishes as he went, and hugged Pons to his heart. So might gas rush to combine with gas.

"Vat happiness!" cried he.

Mme. Cibot was quite touched. "Monsieur is going to dine here every day!" she cried proudly.

That excellent woman departed downstairs again in ignorance of the event which had brought about this result, entered her room like Josepha in *William Tell*, set down the plates and dishes on the table with a bang, and called aloud to her husband:

"Cibot! run to the *Cafe Turc* for two small cups of coffee, and tell the man at the stove that it is for me."

Then she sat down and rested her hands on her massive knees, and gazed out of the window at the opposite wall.

"I will go to-night and see what Ma'am Fontaine says," she thought. (Madame Fontaine told fortunes on the cards for all the servants in the quarter of the Marais.) "Since these two gentlemen came here, we have put two thousand francs in the

savings bank. Two thousand francs in eight years! What luck! Would it be better to make no profit out of M. Pons' dinner and keep him here at home? Ma'am Fontaine's hen will tell me that."

Three years ago Mme. Cibot had begun to cherish a hope that her name might be mentioned in "her gentlemen's" wills; she had redoubled her zeal since that covetous thought tardily sprouted up in the midst of that so honest moustache. Pons hitherto had dined abroad, eluding her desire to have both of "her gentlemen" entirely under her management; his "troubadour" collector's life had scared away certain vague ideas which hovered in La Cibot's brain; but now her shadowy projects assumed the formidable shape of a definite plan, dating from that memorable dinner. Fifteen minutes later she reappeared in the dining-room with two cups of excellent coffee, flanked by a couple of tiny glasses of *kirschwasser*.

"Long lif Montame Zipod!" cried Schmucke; "she haf guessed right!"

The diner-out bemoaned himself a little, while Schmucke met his lamentations with coaxing fondness, like a home pigeon welcoming back a wandering bird. Then the pair set out for the theatre.

Schmucke could not leave his friend in the condition to which he had been brought by the Camusots – mistresses and servants. He knew Pons so well; he feared lest some cruel, sad thought should seize on him at his conductor's desk, and undo all the good done by his welcome home to the nest.

And Schmucke brought his friend back on his arm through the streets at midnight. A lover could not be more careful of his lady. He pointed out the edges of the curbstones, he was on the lookout whenever they stepped on or off the pavement, ready with a warning if there was a gutter to cross. Schmucke could have wished that the streets were paved with cotton-down; he would have had a blue sky overhead, and Pons should hear the music which all the angels in heaven were making for him. He had won the lost province in his friend's heart!

For nearly three months Pons and Schmucke dined together every day. Pons was obliged to retrench at once; for dinner at forty-five francs a month and wine at thirty-five meant precisely eighty francs less to spend on bric-a-brac. And very soon, in spite of all that Schmucke could do, in spite of his little German jokes, Pons fell to regretting the delicate dishes, the liqueurs, the good coffee, the table talk, the insincere politeness, the guests, and the gossip, and the houses where he used to dine. On the wrong side of sixty a man cannot break himself of a habit of thirty-six years' growth. Wine at a hundred and thirty francs per hogshead is scarcely a generous liquid in a *gourmet's* glass; every time that Pons raised it to his lips he thought, with infinite regret, of the exquisite wines in his entertainers' cellars.

In short, at the end of three months, the cruel pangs which had gone near to break Pons' sensitive heart had died away; he forgot everything but the charms of society; and languished for them like some elderly slave of a petticoat compelled to leave the

mistress who too repeatedly deceives him. In vain he tried to hide his profound and consuming melancholy; it was too plain that he was suffering from one of the mysterious complaints which the mind brings upon the body.

A single symptom will throw light upon this case of nostalgia (as it were) produced by breaking away from an old habit; in itself it is trifling, one of the myriad nothings which are as rings in a coat of chain-mail enveloping the soul in a network of iron. One of the keenest pleasures of Pons' old life, one of the joys of the dinner-table parasite at all times, was the "surprise," the thrill produced by the extra dainty dish added triumphantly to the bill of fare by the mistress of a bourgeois house, to give a festal air to the dinner. Pons' stomach hankered after that gastronomical satisfaction. Mme. Cibot, in the pride of her heart, enumerated every dish beforehand; a salt and savor once periodically recurrent, had vanished utterly from daily life. Dinner proceeded without *le plat couvert*, as our grandsires called it. This lay beyond the bounds of Schmucke's powers of comprehension.

Pons had too much delicacy to grumble; but if the case of unappreciated genius is hard, it goes harder still with the stomach whose claims are ignored. Slighted affection, a subject of which too much has been made, is founded upon an illusory longing; for if the creature fails, love can turn to the Creator who has treasures to bestow. But the stomach!.. Nothing can be compared to its sufferings; for, in the first place, one must live.

Pons thought wistfully of certain creams – surely the poetry of cookery! – of certain white sauces, masterpieces of the art; of truffled chickens, fit to melt your heart; and above these, and more than all these, of the famous Rhine carp, only known at Paris, served with what condiments! There were days when Pons, thinking upon Count Popinot's cook, would sigh aloud, "Ah, Sophie!" Any passer-by hearing the exclamation might have thought that the old man referred to a lost mistress; but his fancy dwelt upon something rarer, on a fat Rhine carp with a sauce, thin in the sauce-boat, creamy upon the palate, a sauce that deserved the Montyon prize! The conductor of the orchestra, living on memories of past dinners, grew visibly leaner; he was pining away, a victim to gastric nostalgia.

By the beginning of the fourth month (towards the end of January, 1845), Pons' condition attracted attention at the theatre. The flute, a young man named Wilhelm, like almost all Germans; and Schwab, to distinguish him from all other Wilhelms, if not from all other Schwabs, judged it expedient to open Schmucke's eyes to his friend's state of health. It was a first performance of a piece in which Schmucke's instruments were all required.

"The old gentleman is failing," said the flute; "there is something wrong somewhere; his eyes are heavy, and he doesn't beat time as he used to do," added Wilhelm Schwab, indicating Pons as he gloomily took his place.

"Dat is always de vay, gif a man is sixty years old," answered Schmucke.

The Highland widow, in *The Chronicles of the Canongate*, sent her son to his death to have him beside her for twenty-four hours; and Schmucke could have sacrificed Pons for the sake of seeing his face every day across the dinner-table.

"Everybody in the theatre is anxious about him," continued the flute; "and, as the *premiere danseuse*, Mlle. Brisetout, says, 'he makes hardly any noise now when he blows his nose.'"

And, indeed, a peal like a blast of a horn used to resound through the old musician's bandana handkerchief whenever he raised it to that lengthy and cavernous feature. The President's wife had more frequently found fault with him on that score than on any other.

"I vould gif a goot teal to amuse him," said Schmucke, "he gets so dull."

"M. Pons always seems so much above the like of us poor devils, that, upon my word, I didn't dare to ask him to my wedding," said Wilhelm Schwab. "I am going to be married – "

"How?" demanded Schmucke.

"Oh! quite properly," returned Wilhelm Schwab, taking Schmucke's quaint inquiry for a gibe, of which that perfect Christian was quite incapable.

"Come, gentlemen, take your places!" called Pons, looking round at his little army, as the stage manager's bell rang for the overture.

The piece was a dramatized fairy tale, a pantomime called *The Devil's Betrothed*, which ran for two hundred nights. In the

interval, after the first act, Wilhelm Schwab and Schmucke were left alone in the orchestra, with a house at a temperature of thirty-two degrees Reaumur.

"Tell me your hishdory," said Schmucke.

"Look there! Do you see that young man in the box yonder?.. Do you recognize him?"

"Nefer a pit – "

"Ah! That is because he is wearing yellow gloves and shines with all the radiance of riches, but that is my friend Fritz Brunner out of Frankfort-on-the-Main."

"Dat used to komm to see du blav und sit peside you in der orghestra?"

"The same. You would not believe he could look so different, would you?"

The hero of the promised story was a German of that particular type in which the sombre irony of Goethe's Mephistopheles is blended with a homely cheerfulness found in the romances of August Lafontaine of pacific memory; but the predominating element in the compound of artlessness and guile, of shopkeeper's shrewdness, and the studied carelessness of a member of the Jockey Club, was that form of disgust which set a pistol in the hands of a young Werther, bored to death less by Charlotte than by German princes. It was a thoroughly German face, full of cunning, full of simplicity, stupidity, and courage; the knowledge which brings weariness, the worldly wisdom which the veriest child's trick leaves at fault, the abuse of beer and

tobacco, – all these were there to be seen in it, and to heighten the contrast of opposed qualities, there was a wild diabolical gleam in the fine blue eyes with the jaded expression.

Dressed with all the elegance of a city man, Fritz Brunner sat in full view of the house displaying a bald crown of the tint beloved by Titian, and a few stray fiery red hairs on either side of it; a remnant spared by debauchery and want, that the prodigal might have a right to spend money with the hairdresser when he should come into his fortune. A face, once fair and fresh as the traditional portrait of Jesus Christ, had grown harder since the advent of a red moustache; a tawny beard lent it an almost sinister look. The bright blue eyes had lost something of their clearness in the struggle with distress. The countless courses by which a man sells himself and his honor in Paris had left their traces upon his eyelids and carved lines about the eyes, into which a mother once looked with a mother's rapture to find a copy of her own fashioned by God's hand.

This precocious philosopher, this wizened youth was the work of a stepmother.

Herewith begins the curious history of a prodigal son of Frankfort-on-the-Main – the most extraordinary and astounding portent ever beheld by that well-conducted, if central, city.

Gideon Brunner, father of the aforesaid Fritz, was one of the famous innkeepers of Frankfort, a tribe who make law-authorized incisions in travelers' purses with the connivance of the local bankers. An innkeeper and an honest Calvinist to boot,

he had married a converted Jewess and laid the foundations of his prosperity with the money she brought him.

When the Jewess died, leaving a son Fritz, twelve years of age, under the joint guardianship of his father and maternal uncle, a furrier at Leipsic, head of the firm of Virlaz and Company, Brunner senior was compelled by his brother-in-law (who was by no means as soft as his peltry) to invest little Fritz's money, a goodly quantity of current coin of the realm, with the house of Al-Sartchild. Not a penny of it was he allowed to touch. So, by way of revenge for the Israelite's pertinacity, Brunner senior married again. It was impossible, he said, to keep his huge hotel single-handed; it needed a woman's eye and hand. Gideon Brunner's second wife was an innkeeper's daughter, a very pearl, as he thought; but he had had no experience of only daughters spoiled by father and mother.

The second Mme. Brunner behaved as German girls may be expected to behave when they are frivolous and wayward. She squandered her fortune, she avenged the first Mme. Brunner by making her husband as miserable a man as you could find in the compass of the free city of Frankfort-on-the-Main, where the millionaires, it is said, are about to pass a law compelling womankind to cherish and obey them alone. She was partial to all the varieties of vinegar commonly called Rhine wine in Germany; she was fond of *articles Paris*, of horses and dress; indeed, the one expensive taste which she had not was a liking for women. She took a dislike to little Fritz, and would perhaps have

driven him mad if that young offspring of Calvinism and Judaism had not had Frankfort for his cradle and the firm of Virlaz at Leipsic for his guardian. Uncle Virlaz, however, deep in his furs, confined his guardianship to the safe-keeping of Fritz's silver marks, and left the boy to the tender mercies of this stepmother.

That hyena in woman's form was the more exasperated against the pretty child, the lovely Jewess' son, because she herself could have no children in spite of efforts worthy of a locomotive engine. A diabolical impulse prompted her to plunge her young stepson, at twenty-one years of age, into dissipations contrary to all German habits. The wicked German hoped that English horses, Rhine vinegar, and Goethe's Marguerites would ruin the Jewess' child and shorten his days; for when Fritz came of age, Uncle Virlaz had handed over a very pretty fortune to his nephew. But while roulette at Baden and elsewhere, and boon companions (Wilhelm Schwab among them) devoured the substance accumulated by Uncle Virlaz, the prodigal son himself remained by the will of Providence to point a moral to younger brothers in the free city of Frankfort; parents held him up as a warning and an awful example to their offspring to scare them into steady attendance in their cast-iron counting houses, lined with silver marks.

But so far from perishing in the flower of his age, Fritz Brunner had the pleasure of laying his stepmother in one of those charming little German cemeteries, in which the Teuton indulges his unbridled passion for horticulture under the specious pretext

of honoring his dead. And as the second Mme. Brunner expired while the authors of her being were yet alive, Brunner senior was obliged to bear the loss of the sums of which his wife had drained his coffers, to say nothing of other ills, which had told upon a Herculean constitution, till at the age of sixty-seven the innkeeper had wizened and shrunk as if the famous Borgia's poison had undermined his system. For ten whole years he had supported his wife, and now he inherited nothing! The innkeeper was a second ruin of Heidelberg, repaired continually, it is true, by travelers' hotel bills, much as the remains of the castle of Heidelberg itself are repaired to sustain the enthusiasm of the tourists who flock to see so fine and well-preserved a relic of antiquity.

At Frankfort the disappointment caused as much talk as a failure. People pointed out Brunner, saying, "See what a man may come to with a bad wife that leaves him nothing and a son brought up in the French fashion."

In Italy and Germany the French nation is the root of all evil, the target for all bullets. "But the god pursuing his way – " (For the rest, see Lefranc de Pompignan's Ode.)

The wrath of the proprietor of the Grand Hotel de Hollande fell on others besides the travelers, whose bills were swelled with his resentment. When his son was utterly ruined, Gideon, regarding him as the indirect cause of all his misfortunes, refused him bread and salt, fire, lodging, and tobacco – the force of the paternal malediction in a German and an innkeeper could no farther go. Whereupon the local authorities, making

no allowance for the father's misdeeds, regarded him as one of the most ill-used persons in Frankfort-on-the-Main, came to his assistance, fastened a quarrel on Fritz (*une querelle d'Allemand*), and expelled him from the territory of the free city. Justice in Frankfort is no whit wiser nor more humane than elsewhere, albeit the city is the seat of the German Diet. It is not often that a magistrate traces back the stream of wrongdoing and misfortune to the holder of the urn from which the first beginnings trickled forth. If Brunner forgot his son, his son's friends speedily followed the old innkeeper's example.

Ah! if the journalists, the dandies, and some few fair Parisians among the audience wondered how that German with the tragical countenance had cropped up on a first night to occupy a side box all to himself when fashionable Paris filled the house, – if these could have seen the history played out upon the stage before the prompter's box, they would have found it far more interesting than the transformation scenes of *The Devil's Betrothed*, though indeed it was the two hundred thousandth representation of a sublime allegory performed aforetime in Mesopotamia three thousand years before Christ was born.

Fritz betook himself on foot to Strasbourg, and there found what the prodigal son of the Bible failed to find – to wit, a friend. And herein is revealed the superiority of Alsace, where so many generous hearts beat to show Germany the beauty of a combination of Gallic wit and Teutonic solidity. Wilhelm Schwab, but lately left in possession of a hundred thousand francs

by the death of both parents, opened his arms, his heart, his house, his purse to Fritz. As for describing Fritz's feelings, when dusty, down on his luck, and almost like a leper, he crossed the Rhine and found a real twenty-franc piece held out by the hand of a real friend, – that moment transcends the powers of the prose writer; Pindar alone could give it forth to humanity in Greek that should rekindle the dying warmth of friendship in the world.

Put the names of Fritz and Wilheim beside those of Damon and Pythias, Castor and Pollux, Orestes and Pylades, Dubreuil and Pmejah, Schmucke and Pons, and all the names that we imagine for the two friends of Monomotapa, for La Fontaine (man of genius though he was) has made of them two disembodied spirits – they lack reality. The two new names may join the illustrious company, and with so much the more reason, since that Wilhelm who had helped to drink Fritz's inheritance now proceeded, with Fritz's assistance, to devour his own substance; smoking, needless to say, every known variety of tobacco.

The pair, strange to relate, squandered the property in the dullest, stupidest, most commonplace fashion, in Strasbourg *brasseries*, in the company of ballet-girls of the Strasbourg theatres, and little Alsaciennes who had not a rag of a tattered reputation left.

Every morning they would say, "We really must stop this, and make up our minds and do something or other with the money that is left."

"Pooh!" Fritz would retort, "just one more day, and to-morrow"… ah! to-morrow.

In the lives of Prodigal Sons, *To-day* is a prodigious coxcomb, but *To-morrow* is a very poltroon, taking fright at the big words of his predecessor. *To-day* is the truculent captain of old world comedy, *To-morrow* the clown of modern pantomime.

When the two friends had reached their last thousand-franc note, they took places in the mail-coach, styled Royal, and departed for Paris, where they installed themselves in the attics of the Hotel du Rhin, in the Rue du Mail, the property of one Graff, formerly Gideon Brunner's head-waiter. Fritz found a situation as clerk in the Kellers' bank (on Graff's recommendation), with a salary of six hundred francs. And a place as book-keeper was likewise found for Wilhelm, in the business of Graff the fashionable tailor, brother of Graff of the Hotel du Rhin, who found the scantily-paid employment for the pair of prodigals, for the sake of old times, and his apprenticeship at the Hotel de Hollande. These two incidents – the recognition of a ruined man by a well-to-do friend, and a German innkeeper interesting himself in two penniless fellow-countrymen – give, no doubt, an air of improbability to the story, but truth is so much the more like fiction, since modern writers of fiction have been at such untold pains to imitate truth.

It was not long before Fritz, a clerk with six hundred francs, and Wilhelm, a book-keeper with precisely the same salary, discovered the difficulties of existence in a city so full of

temptations. In 1837, the second year of their abode, Wilhelm, who possessed a pretty talent for the flute, entered Pons' orchestra, to earn a little occasional butter to put on his dry bread. As to Fritz, his only way to an increase of income lay through the display of the capacity for business inherited by a descendant of the Virlaz family. Yet, in spite of his assiduity, in spite of abilities which possibly may have stood in his way, his salary only reached the sum of two thousand francs in 1843. Penury, that divine stepmother, did for the two men all that their mothers had not been able to do for them; Poverty taught them thrift and worldly wisdom; Poverty gave them her grand rough education, the lessons which she drives with hard knocks into the heads of great men, who seldom know a happy childhood. Fritz and Wilhelm, being but ordinary men, learned as little as they possibly could in her school; they dodged the blows, shrank from her hard breast and bony arms, and never discovered the good fairy lurking within, ready to yield to the caresses of genius. One thing, however, they learned thoroughly – they discovered the value of money, and vowed to clip the wings of riches if ever a second fortune should come to their door.

This was the history which Wilhelm Schwab related in German, at much greater length, to his friend the pianist, ending with;

"Well, Papa Schmucke, the rest is soon explained. Old Brunner is dead. He left four millions! He made an immense amount of money out of Baden railways, though neither his son

nor M. Graff, with whom we lodge, had any idea that the old man was one of the original shareholders. I am playing the flute here for the last time this evening; I would have left some days ago, but this was a first performance, and I did not want to spoil my part."

"Goot, mine friend," said Schmucke. "But who is die prite?"

"She is Mlle. Graff, the daughter of our host, the landlord of the Hotel du Rhin. I have loved Mlle. Emilie these seven years; she has read so many immoral novels, that she refused all offers for me, without knowing what might come of it. She will be a very wealthy young lady; her uncles, the tailors in the Rue de Richelieu, will leave her all their money. Fritz is giving me the money we squandered at Strasbourg five times over! He is putting a million francs in a banking house, M. Graff the tailor is adding another five hundred thousand francs, and Mlle. Emilie's father not only allows me to incorporate her portion – two hundred and fifty thousand francs – with the capital, but he himself will be a shareholder with as much again. So the firm of Brunner, Schwab and Company will start with two millions five hundred thousand francs. Fritz has just bought fifteen hundred thousand francs' worth of shares in the Bank of France to guarantee our account with them. That is not all Fritz's fortune. He has his father's house property, supposed to be worth another million, and he has let the Grand Hotel de Hollande already to a cousin of the Graffs."

"You look sad ven you look at your friend," remarked Schmucke, who had listened with great interest. "Kann you pe

chealous of him?"

"I am jealous for Fritz's happiness," said Wilhelm. "Does that face look as if it belonged to a happy man? I am afraid of Paris; I should like to see him do as I am doing. The old tempter may awake again. Of our two heads, his carries the less ballast. His dress, and the opera-glass and the rest of it make me anxious. He keeps looking at the lorettes in the house. Oh! if you only knew how hard it is to marry Fritz. He has a horror of 'going a-courting,' as you say; you would have to give him a drop into a family, just as in England they give a man a drop into the next world."

During the uproar that usually marks the end of a first night, the flute delivered his invitation to the conductor. Pons accepted gleefully; and, for the first time in three months, Schmucke saw a smile on his friend's face. They went back to the Rue de Normandie in perfect silence; that sudden flash of joy had thrown a light on the extent of the disease which was consuming Pons. Oh, that a man so truly noble, so disinterested, so great in feeling, should have such a weakness!.. This was the thought that struck the stoic Schmucke dumb with amazement. He grew woefully sad, for he began to see that there was no help for it; he must even renounce the pleasure of seeing "his goot Bons" opposite him at the dinner-table, for the sake of Pons' welfare; and he did not know whether he could give him up; the mere thought of it drove him distracted.

Meantime, Pons' proud silence and withdrawal to the Mons

Aventinus of the Rue de Normandie had, as might be expected, impressed the Presidente, not that she troubled herself much about her parasite, now that she was freed from him. She thought, with her charming daughter, that Cousin Pons had seen through her little "Lili's" joke. But it was otherwise with her husband the President.

Camusot de Marville, a short and stout man, grown solemn since his promotion at the Court, admired Cicero, preferred the Opera-Comique to the Italiens, compared the actors one with another, and followed the multitude step by step. He used to recite all the articles in the Ministerialist journals, as if he were saying something original, and in giving his opinion at the Council Board he paraphrased the remarks of the previous speaker. His leading characteristics were sufficiently well known; his position compelled him to take everything seriously; and he was particularly tenacious of family ties.

Like most men who are ruled by their wives, the President asserted his independence in trifles, in which his wife was very careful not to thwart him. For a month he was satisfied with the Presidente's commonplace explanations of Pons' disappearance; but at last it struck him as singular that the old musician, a friend of forty years' standing, should first make them so valuable a present as a fan that belonged to Mme. de Pompadour, and then immediately discontinue his visits. Count Popinot had pronounced the trinket a masterpiece; when its owner went to Court, the fan had been passed from hand to hand, and her vanity

was not a little gratified by the compliments it received; others had dwelt on the beauties of the ten ivory sticks, each one covered with delicate carving, the like of which had never been seen. A Russian lady (Russian ladies are apt to forget that they are not in Russia) had offered her six thousand francs for the marvel one day at Count Popinot's house, and smiled to see it in such hands. Truth to tell, it was a fan for a Duchess.

"It cannot be denied that poor Cousin Pons understands rubbish of that sort – " said Cecile, the day after the bid.

"Rubbish!" cried her parent. "Why, Government is just about to buy the late M. le Conseiller Dusommerard's collection for three hundred thousand francs; and the State and the Municipality of Paris between them are spending nearly a million francs over the purchase and repair of the Hotel de Cluny to house the 'rubbish,' as you call it. – Such 'rubbish,' dear child," he resumed, "is frequently all that remains of vanished civilizations. An Etruscan jar, and a necklace, which sometimes fetch forty and fifty thousand francs, is 'rubbish' which reveals the perfection of art at the time of the siege of Troy, proving that the Etruscans were Trojan refugees in Italy."

This was the President's cumbrous way of joking; the short, fat man was heavily ironical with his wife and daughter.

"The combination of various kinds of knowledge required to understand such 'rubbish,' Cecile," he resumed, "is a science in itself, called archaeology. Archaeology comprehends architecture, sculpture, painting, goldsmiths' work, ceramics,

cabinetmaking (a purely modern art), lace, tapestry – in short, human handiwork of every sort and description."

"Then Cousin Pons is learned?" said Cecile.

"Ah! by the by, why is he never to be seen nowadays?" asked the President. He spoke with the air of a man in whom thousands of forgotten and dormant impressions have suddenly begun to stir, and shaping themselves into one idea, reach consciousness with a ricochet, as sportsmen say.

"He must have taken offence at nothing at all," answered his wife. "I dare say I was not as fully sensible as I might have been of the value of the fan that he gave me. I am ignorant enough, as you know, of – "

"*You!* One of Servin's best pupils, and you don't know Watteau?" cried the President.

"I know Gerard and David and Gros and Griodet, and M. de Forbin and M. Turpin de Crisse – "

"You ought – "

"Ought what, sir?" demanded the lady, gazing at her husband with the air of a Queen of Sheba.

"To know a Watteau when you see it, my dear. Watteau is very much in fashion," answered the President with meekness, that told plainly how much he owed to his wife.

This conversation took place a few days before that night of first performance of *The Devil's Betrothed*, when the whole orchestra noticed how ill Pons was looking. But by that time all the circle of dinner-givers who were used to seeing Pons' face

at their tables, and to send him on errands, had begun to ask each other for news of him, and uneasiness increased when it was reported by some who had seen him that he was always in his place at the theatre. Pons had been very careful to avoid his old acquaintances whenever he met them in the streets; but one day it so fell out that he met Count Popinot, the ex-cabinet minister, face to face in the bric-a-brac dealer's shop in the new Boulevard Beaumarchais. The dealer was none other than that Monistrol of whom Pons had spoken to the Presidente, one of the famous and audacious vendors whose cunning enthusiasm leads them to set more and more value daily on their wares; for curiosities, they tell you, are growing so scarce that they are hardly to be found at all nowadays.

"Ah, my dear Pons, how comes it that we never see you now? We miss you very much, and Mme. Popinot does not know what to think of your desertion."

"M. le Comte," said the good man, "I was made to feel in the house of a relative that at my age one is not wanted in the world. I have never had much consideration shown me, but at any rate I had not been insulted. I have never asked anything of any man," he broke out with an artist's pride. "I have often made myself useful in return for hospitality. But I have made a mistake, it seems; I am indefinitely beholden to those who honor me by allowing me to sit at table with them; my friends, and my relatives… Well and good; I have sent in my resignation as smellfeast. At home I find daily something which no other house

has offered me – a real friend."

The old artist's power had not failed him; with tone and gesture he put such bitterness into the words, that the peer of France was struck by them. He drew Pons aside.

"Come, now, my old friend, what is it? What has hurt you? Could you not tell me in confidence? You will permit me to say that at my house surely you have always met with consideration – "

"You are the one exception," said the artist. "And besides, you are a great lord and a statesman, you have so many things to think about. That would excuse anything, if there were need for it."

The diplomatic skill that Popinot had acquired in the management of men and affairs was brought to bear upon Pons, till at length the story of his misfortunes in the President's house was drawn from him.

Popinot took up the victim's cause so warmly that he told the story to Mme. Popinot as soon as he went home, and that excellent and noble-natured woman spoke to the Presidente on the subject at the first opportunity. As Popinot himself likewise said a word or two to the President, there was a general explanation in the family of Camusot de Marville.

Camusot was not exactly master in his own house; but this time his remonstrance was so well founded in law and in fact, that his wife and daughter were forced to acknowledge the truth. They both humbled themselves and threw the blame on the servants. The servants, first bidden, and then chidden, only

obtained pardon by a full confession, which made it clear to the President's mind that Pons had done rightly to stop away. The President displayed himself before the servants in all his masculine and magisterial dignity, after the manner of men who are ruled by their wives. He informed his household that they should be dismissed forthwith, and forfeit any advantages which their long term of service in his house might have brought them, unless from that time forward his cousin and all those who did him the honor of coming to his house were treated as he himself was. At which speech Madeleine was moved to smile.

"You have only one chance of salvation as it is," continued the President. "Go to my cousin, make your excuses to him, and tell him that you will lose your situations unless he forgives you, for I shall turn you all away if he does not."

Next morning the President went out fairly early to pay a call on his cousin before going down to the court. The apparition of M. le President de Marville, announced by Mme. Cibot, was an event in the house. Pons, thus honored for the first time in his life saw reparation ahead.

"At last, my dear cousin," said the President after the ordinary greetings; "at last I have discovered the cause of your retreat. Your behavior increases, if that were possible, my esteem for you. I have but one word to say in that connection. My servants have all been dismissed. My wife and daughter are in despair; they want to see you to have an explanation. In all this, my cousin, there is one innocent person, and he is an old judge; you will

not punish me, will you, for the escapade of a thoughtless child who wished to dine with the Popinots? especially when I come to beg for peace, admitting that all the wrong has been on our side?.. An old friendship of thirty-six years, even suppose that there had been a misunderstanding, has still some claims. Come, sign a treaty of peace by dining with us to-night – "

Pons involved himself in a diffuse reply, and ended by informing his cousin that he was to sign a marriage contract that evening; how that one of the orchestra was not only going to be married, but also about to fling his flute to the winds to become a banker.

"Very well. To-morrow."

"Mme. la Comtesse Popinot has done me the honor of asking me, cousin. She was so kind as to write – "

"The day after to-morrow then."

"M. Brunner, a German, my first flute's future partner, returns the compliment paid him to-day by the young couple – "

"You are such pleasant company that it is not surprising that people dispute for the honor of seeing you. Very well, next Sunday? Within a week, as we say at the courts?"

"On Sunday we are to dine with M. Graff, the flute's father-in-law."

"Very well, on Saturday. Between now and then you will have time to reassure a little girl who has shed tears already over her fault. God asks no more than repentance; you will not be more severe than the Eternal father with poor little Cecile? – "

Pons, thus reached on his weak side, again plunged into formulas more than polite, and went as far as the stairhead with the President.

An hour later the President's servants arrived in a troop on poor Pons' second floor. They behaved after the manner of their kind; they cringed and fawned; they wept. Madeleine took M. Pons aside and flung herself resolutely at his feet.

"It is all my fault; and monsieur knows quite well that I love him," here she burst into tears. "It was vengeance boiling in my veins; monsieur ought to throw all the blame of the unhappy affair on that. We are all to lose our pensions… Monsieur, I was mad, and I would not have the rest suffer for my fault… I can see now well enough that fate did not make me for monsieur. I have come to my senses, I aimed too high, but I love you still, monsieur. These ten years I have thought of nothing but the happiness of making you happy and looking after things here. What a lot!.. Oh! if monsieur but knew how much I love him! But monsieur must have seen it through all my mischief-making. If I were to die to-morrow, what would they find? – A will in your favor, monsieur… Yes, monsieur, in my trunk under my best things."

Madeleine had set a responsive chord vibrating; the passion inspired in another may be unwelcome, but it will always be gratifying to self-love; this was the case with the old bachelor. After generously pardoning Madeleine, he extended his forgiveness to the other servants, promising to use his influence

with his cousin the Presidente on their behalf.

It was unspeakably pleasant to Pons to find all his old enjoyments restored to him without any loss of self-respect. The world had come to Pons, he had risen in the esteem of his circle; but Schmucke looked so downcast and dubious when he heard the story of the triumph, that Pons felt hurt. When, however, the kind-hearted German saw the sudden change wrought in Pons' face, he ended by rejoicing with his friend, and made a sacrifice of the happiness that he had known during those four months that he had had Pons all to himself. Mental suffering has this immense advantage over physical ills – when the cause is removed it ceases at once. Pons was not like the same man that morning. The old man, depressed and visibly failing, had given place to the serenely contented Pons, who entered the Presidente's house that October afternoon with the Marquise de Pompadour's fan in his pocket. Schmucke, on the other hand, pondered deeply over this phenomenon, and could not understand it; your true stoic never can understand the courtier that dwells in a Frenchman. Pons was a born Frenchman of the Empire; a mixture of eighteenth century gallantry and that devotion to womankind so often celebrated in songs of the type of *Partant pour la Syrie*.

So Schmucke was fain to bury his chagrin beneath the flowers of his German philosophy; but a week later he grew so yellow that Mme. Cibot exerted her ingenuity to call in the parish doctor. The leech had fears of icterus, and left Mme. Cibot frightened half out of her wits by the Latin word for an attack of the

jaundice.

Meantime the two friends went out to dinner together, perhaps for the first time in their lives. For Schmucke it was a return to the Fatherland; for Johann Graff of the Hotel du Rhin and his daughter Emilie, Wolfgang Graff the tailor and his wife, Fritz Brunner and Wilhelm Schwab, were Germans, and Pons and the notary were the only Frenchmen present at the banquet. The Graffs of the tailor's business owned a splendid house in the Rue de Richelieu, between the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and the Rue Villedo; they had brought up their niece, for Emilie's father, not without reason, had feared contact with the very mixed society of an inn for his daughter. The good tailor Graffs, who loved Emilie as if she had been their own daughter, were giving up the ground floor of their great house to the young couple, and here the bank of Brunner, Schwab and Company was to be established. The arrangements for the marriage had been made about a month ago; some time must elapse before Fritz Brunner, author of all this felicity, could settle his deceased father's affairs, and the famous firm of tailors had taken advantage of the delay to redecorate the first floor and to furnish it very handsomely for the bride and bridegroom. The offices of the bank had been fitted into the wing which united a handsome business house with the hotel at the back, between courtyard and garden.

On the way from the Rue de Normandie to the Rue de Richelieu, Pons drew from the abstracted Schmucke the details

of the story of the modern prodigal son, for whom Death had killed the fatted innkeeper. Pons, but newly reconciled with his nearest relatives, was immediately smitten with a desire to make a match between Fritz Brunner and Cecile de Marville. Chance ordained that the notary was none other than Berthier, old Cardot's son-in-law and successor, the sometime second clerk with whom Pons had been wont to dine.

"Ah! M. Berthier, you here!" he said, holding out a hand to his host of former days.

"We have not had the pleasure of seeing you at dinner lately; how is it?" returned the notary. "My wife has been anxious about you. We saw you at the first performance of *The Devil's Betrothed*, and our anxiety became curiosity?"

"Old folk are sensitive," replied the worthy musician; "they make the mistake of being a century behind the times, but how can it be helped? It is quite enough to represent one century – they cannot entirely belong to the century which sees them die."

"Ah!" said the notary, with a shrewd look, "one cannot run two centuries at once."

"By the by," continued Pons, drawing the young lawyer into a corner, "why do you not find some one for my cousin Cecile de Marville – "

"Ah! why – ?" answered Berthier. "In this century, when luxury has filtered down to our very porters' lodges, a young fellow hesitates before uniting his lot with the daughter of a President of the Court of Appeal in Paris if she brings him only

a hundred thousand francs. In the rank of life in which Mlle. de Marville's husband would take, the wife was never yet known that did not cost her husband three thousand francs a year; the interest on a hundred thousand francs would scarcely find her in pin-money. A bachelor with an income of fifteen or twenty thousand francs can live on an entre-sol; he is not expected to cut any figure; he need not keep more than one servant, and all his surplus income he can spend on his amusements; he puts himself in the hands of a good tailor, and need not trouble any further about keeping up appearances. Far-sighted mothers make much of him; he is one of the kings of fashion in Paris.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.