

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE CELIBATES

Honoré Balzac

The Celibates

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25020819

The Celibates Includes: Pierrette, The Vicar of Tours, and The Two Brothers:

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	4
PIERRETTE	13
DEDICATION	13
I	14
II	30
III	46
IV	77
V	97
VI	116
VII	139
VIII	156
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	179

Honoré de Balzac

The Celibates Includes: Pierrette, The Vicar of Tours, and The Two Brothers

INTRODUCTION

Les Celibataires, the longest number of the original *Comédie Humaine* under a single title, next to *Illusions perdues*, is not, like that book, connected by any unity of story. Indeed, the general bond of union is pretty weak; and though it is quite true that bachelors and old maids are the heroes and heroines of all three, it would be rather hard to establish any other bond of connection, and it is rather unlikely that any one unprompted would fix on this as a sufficient ground of partnership.

Two at least of the component parts, however, are of very high excellence. I do not myself think that *Pierrette*, which opens the series, is quite the equal of its companions. Written, as it was, for Countess Anna de Hanska, Balzac's step-daughter of the future, while she was still very young, it partakes necessarily of the rather elaborate artificiality of all attempts to suit the young person, of French attempts in particular, and it may perhaps

be said of Balzac's attempts most of all. It belongs, in a way, to the Arcis series – the series which also includes the fine *Tenebreuse Affaire* and the unfinished *Depute d'Arcis*– but is not very closely connected therewith. The picture of the actual *Celibataires*, the brother and sister Rogron, with which it opens, is one of Balzac's best styles, and is executed with all his usual mastery both of the minute and of the at least partially repulsive, showing also that strange knowledge of the *bourgeois de Paris* which, somehow or other, he seems to have attained by dint of unknown foregatherings in his ten years of apprenticeship. But when we come to *Pierrette* herself, the story is, I think, rather less satisfying. Her persecutions and her end, and the devotion of the faithful Brigaut and the rest, are pathetic no doubt, but tend (I hope it is not heartless to say it) just a very little towards *sensiblerie*. The fact is that the thing is not quite in Balzac's line.

Le Cure de Tours, is certainly on a higher level, and has attracted the most magnificent eulogies from some of the novelist's admirers. I think both Mr. Henry James and Mr. Wedmore have singled out this little piece for detailed and elaborate praise, and there is no doubt that it is a happy example of a kind in which the author excelled. The opening, with its evident but not obtruded remembrance of the old and well-founded superstition – derived from the universal belief in some form of Nemesis – that an extraordinary sense of happiness, good luck, or anything of the kind, is a precursor of misfortune, and calls for some instant act of sacrifice or humiliation, is

very striking; and the working out of the vengeance of the goddess by the very ungoddess-like though feminine hand of Mademoiselle Gamard has much that is commendable. Nothing in its well exemplified kind is better touched off than the Listomere coterie, from the shrewdness of Monsieur de Bourbonne to the selfishness of Madame de Listomere. I do not know that the old maid herself – cat, and far worst than cat as she is – is at all exaggerated, and the sketch of the coveted *appartement* and its ill-fated *meuble* is about as good as it can be. And the battle between Madame de Listomere and the Abbe Troubert, which has served as a model for many similar things, has, if it has often been equaled, not often been surpassed.

I cannot, however, help thinking that there is more than a little exaggeration in more than one point of the story. The Abbe Birotteau is surely a little too much of a fool; the Abbe Troubert an Iago a little too much wanting in verisimilitude; and the central incident of the clause about the furniture too manifestly improbable. Taking the first and the last points together, is it likely that any one not quite an idiot should, in the first place, remain so entirely ignorant of the value of his property; should, in the second, though, ignorant or not, he attached the greatest possible *pretium affectionis* to it, contract to resign it for such a ridiculous consideration; and should, in the third, take the fatal step without so much as remembering the condition attached thereto? If it be answered that Birotteau *was* idiot enough to do such a thing, then it must be observed further that one's sympathy

is frozen by the fact. Such a man deserved such treatment. And, again, even if French justice was, and perhaps is, as much influenced by secret considerations as Balzac loves to represent it, we must agree with that member of the Listomere society who pointed out that no tribunal could possibly uphold such an obviously iniquitous bargain. As for Troubert, the idea of the Jesuitical ecclesiastic (though Balzac was not personally hostile to the Jesuits) was a common one at the time, and no doubt popular, but the actual personage seems to me nearer to Eugene Sue's Rodin in some ways than I could have desired.

These things, however, are very much a case of "As You Like It" or "As It Strikes You," and I have said that *Le Cure de Tours* strikes some good judges as of exceptional merit, while no one can refuse it merit in a high degree. I should not, except for the opening, place it in the very highest class of the *Comedie*, but it is high beyond all doubt in the second.

The third part (The Two Brothers/A Bachelor's Establishment) of *Les Celibataires* takes very high rank among its companions. As in most of his best books, Balzac has set at work divers favorite springs of action, and has introduced personages of whom he has elsewhere given, not exactly replicas – he never did that – but companion portraits. And he has once more justified the proceeding amply. Whether he has not also justified the reproach, such as it is, of those who say that to see the most congenial expression of his fullest genius, you must go to his bad characters and not to his good, readers shall determine

for themselves after reading the book.

It was the product of the year 1842, when the author was at the ripest of his powers, and after which, with the exception of *Les Parents Pauvres*, he produced not much of his very best save in continuations and rehandlings of earlier efforts. He changed his title a good deal, and in that MS. correction of a copy of the *Comedie* which has been taken, perhaps without absolutely decisive authority, as the basis of the *Edition Definitive*, he adopted *La Rabouilleuse* as his latest favorite. This, besides its quaintness, has undoubted merit as fixing the attention on one at least of the chief figures of the book, while *Un Menage de garcon* only obliquely indicates the real purport of the novel. Jean-Jacques Rouget is a most unfortunate creature, who anticipates Baron Hulot as an example of absolute dependence on things of the flesh, *plus* a kind of cretinism, which Hulot, to do him justice, does not exhibit even in his worst degradation. But his "bachelor establishment," though undoubtedly useful for the purposes of the story, might have been changed for something else, and his personality have been considerably altered, without very much affecting the general drift of the fiction.

Flore Brazier, on the other hand, the *Rabouilleuse* herself, is essential, and with Maxence Gilet and Philippe Bridau forms the centre of the action and the passion of the book. She ranks, indeed, with those few feminine types, Valerie Marneffe, La Cousine Bette, Eugenie Grandet, Beatrix, Madame de Maufrigneuse, and perhaps Esther Gobseck, whom Balzac has

tried to draw at full length. It is to be observed that though quite without morals of any kind, she is not *ab initio* or intrinsically a she-fiend like Valerie or Lisbeth. She does not do harm for harm's sake, nor even directly to gratify spite, greed, or other purely unsocial and detestable passions. She is a type of feminine sensuality of the less ambitious and restless sort. Given a decent education, a fair fortune, a good-looking and vigorous husband to whom she had taken a fancy, and no special temptation, and she might have been a blameless, merry, "sonsy" *commere*, and have died in an odor of very reasonable sanctity. Poverty, ignorance, the Rougets (father and son), Maxence Gilet, and Philippe Bridau came in her way, and she lived and died as Balzac has shown her. He has done nothing more "inevitable;" a few things more complete and satisfactory.

Maxence Gilet is a not much less remarkable sketch, though it is not easy to say that he is on the same level. Gilet is the man of distinct gifts, of some virtues, or caricatures of virtues, who goes to the devil through idleness, fulness of bread, and lack of any worthy occupation. He is extraordinarily unconventional for a French figure in fiction, even for a figure drawn by such a French genius as Balzac. But he is also hardly to be called a great type, and I do not quite see why he should have succumbed before Philippe as he did.

Philippe himself is more complicated, and, perhaps, more questionable. He is certainly one of Balzac's *fleurs du mal*; he is studied and personally conducted from beginning to end with an

extraordinary and loving care; but is he quite "of a piece"? That he should have succeeded in defeating the combination against which his virtuous mother and brother failed is not an undue instance of the irony of life. The defeat of such adversaries as Flore and Max has, of course, the merit of poetical justice and the interest of "diamond cut diamond." But is not the terrible Philippe Bridau, the "*Mephistopheles a cheval*" of the latter part of the book, rather inconsistent with the common-place ne'er-to-well of the earlier? Not only does it require no unusual genius to waste money, when you have it, in the channels of the drinking-shop, the gaming table, and elsewhere, to sponge for more on your mother and brother, to embezzle when they are squeezed dry, and to take to downright robbery when nothing else is left; but a person who, in the various circumstances and opportunities of Bridau, finds nothing better to do than these ordinary things, can hardly be a person of exceptional intellectual resource. There is here surely that sudden and unaccounted-for change of character which the second-rate novelist and dramatists may permit himself, but from which the first-rate should abstain.

This, however, may be an academic objection, and certainly the book is of first-class interest. The minor characters, the mother and brother, the luckless aunt with her combination at last turning up when the rascal Philippe has stolen her stake-money, the satellites and abettors of Max in the club of "La Desoeuvrance," the slightly theatrical Spaniard, and all the rest of them, are excellent. The book is an eminently characteristic

one – more so, indeed, than more than one of those in which people are often invited to make acquaintance with Balzac.

Pierrette, which was earlier called *Pierrette Lorrain*, was issued in 1840, first in the *Siecle*, and then in volume form, published by Souverain. In both issues it had nine chapter or book divisions with headings. With the other *Celibataires* it entered the *Comedie* as a *Scene de la Vie de Province* in 1843.

Le Cure de Tours (which Balzac had at one time intended to call by the name of the Cure's enemy, and which at first was simply called by the general title *Les Celibataires*) is much older than its companions, and appeared in 1832 in the *Scenes de la Vie Privee*. It was soon properly shifted to the *Vie de Province*, and as such in due time joined the *Comedie* bearing its present title.

The third story of *Les Celibataires* has a rather more varied bibliographical history than the others. The first part, that dealing with the early misconduct of Philippe Bridau, was published separately, as *Les Deux Freres*, in the *Presse* during the spring of 1841, and a year or so later in volumes. It had nine chapters with headings. The volume form also included under the same title the second part, which, as *Un Menage de garcon en Province*, had been published in the same newspaper in the autumn of 1842. This had sixteen chapters in both issues, and in the volumes two part-headings – one identical with the newspaper title, and the other "A qui la Succession?" The whole book then took rank in the *Comedie* under the second title, *Un Menage de garcon*, and retained this during Balzac's life and long afterwards. In the

Edition Definitive, as observed above, he had marked it as *La Rabouilleuse*, after having also thought of *Le Bonhomme Rouget*. For English use, the better known, though not last or best title, is clearly preferable, as it can be translated, while *La Rabouilleuse* cannot.

George Saintsbury

PIERRETTE

DEDICATION

To Mademoiselle Anna Hanska:

Dear Child, – You, the joy of the household, you, whose pink or white pelerine flutters in summer among the groves of Wierszschovnia like a will-o'-the-wisp, followed by the tender eyes of your father and your mother, – how can I dedicate to you a story full of melancholy? And yet, ought not sorrows to be spoken of to a young girl idolized as you are, since the day may come when your sweet hands will be called to minister to them? It is so difficult, Anna, to find in the history of our manners and morals a subject that is worthy of your eyes, that no choice has been left me; but perhaps you will be made to feel how fortunate your fate is when you read the story sent to you by Your old friend, De Balzac.

I

THE LORRAINS

At the dawn of an October day in 1827 a young fellow about sixteen years of age, whose clothing proclaimed what modern phraseology so insolently calls a proletary, was standing in a small square of Lower Provins. At that early hour he could examine without being observed the various houses surrounding the open space, which was oblong in form. The mills along the river were already working; the whirr of their wheels, repeated by the echoes of the Upper Town in the keen air and sparkling clearness of the early morning, only intensified the general silence so that the wheels of a diligence could be heard a league away along the highroad. The two longest sides of the square, separated by an avenue of lindens, were built in the simple style which expresses so well the peaceful and matter-of-fact life of the bourgeoisie. No signs of commerce were to be seen; on the other hand, the luxurious porte-cocheres of the rich were few, and those few turned seldom on their hinges, excepting that of Monsieur Martener, a physician, whose profession obliged him to keep a cabriolet, and to use it. A few of the house-fronts were covered by grape vines, others by roses climbing to the second-story windows, through which they wafted the fragrance of their scattered bunches. One end of the square enters the main street of the Lower Town, the gardens of which reach to the bank of

one of the two rivers which water the valley of Provins. The other end of the square enters a street which runs parallel to the main street.

At the latter, which was also the quietest end of the square, the young workman recognized the house of which he was in search, which showed a front of white stone grooved in lines to represent courses, windows with closed gray blinds, and slender iron balconies decorated with rosettes painted yellow. Above the ground floor and the first floor were three dormer windows projecting from a slate roof; on the peak of the central one was a new weather-vane. This modern innovation represented a hunter in the attitude of shooting a hare. The front door was reached by three stone steps. On one side of this door a leaden pipe discharged the sink-water into a small street-gutter, showing the whereabouts of the kitchen. On the other side were two windows, carefully closed by gray shutters in which were heart-shaped openings cut to admit the light; these windows seemed to be those of the dining-room. In the elevation gained by the three steps were vent-holes to the cellar, closed by painted iron shutters fantastically cut in open-work. Everything was new. In this repaired and restored house, the fresh-colored look of which contrasted with the time-worn exteriors of all the other houses, an observer would instantly perceive the paltry taste and perfect self-satisfaction of the retired petty shopkeeper.

The young man looked at these details with an expression of pleasure that seemed to have something rather sad in it; his eyes

roved from the kitchen to the roof, with a motion that showed a deliberate purpose. The rosy glow of the rising sun fell on a calico curtain at one of the garret windows, the others being without that luxury. As he caught sight of it the young fellow's face brightened gaily. He stepped back a little way, leaned against a linden, and sang, in the drawling tone peculiar to the west of France, the following Breton ditty, published by Bruguier, a composer to whom we are indebted for many charming melodies. In Brittany, the young villagers sing this song to all newly-married couples on their wedding-day: —

"We've come to wish you happiness in marriage,
To m'sieur your husband
As well as to you:

"You have just been bound, madam' la mariee,
With bonds of gold
That only death unbinds:

"You will go no more to balls or gay assemblies;
You must stay at home
While we shall go.

"Have you thought well how you are pledged to be
True to your spouse,
And love him like yourself?

"Receive these flowers our hands do now present you;

Alas! your fleeting honors
Will fade as they."

This native air (as sweet as that adapted by Chateaubriand to *Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore*), sung in this little town of the Brie district, must have been to the ears of a Breton maiden the touchstone of imperious memories, so faithfully does it picture the manners and customs, the surroundings and the heartiness of her noble old land, where a sort of melancholy reigns, hardly to be defined; caused, perhaps, by the aspect of life in Brittany, which is deeply touching. This power of awakening a world of grave and sweet and tender memories by a familiar and sometimes lively ditty, is the privilege of those popular songs which are the superstitions of music, – if we may use the word "superstition" as signifying all that remains after the ruin of a people, all that survives their revolutions.

As he finished the first couple, the singer, who never took his eyes from the attic curtain, saw no signs of life. While he sang the second, the curtain stirred. When the words "Receive these flowers" were sung, a youthful face appeared; a white hand cautiously opened the casement, and a girl made a sign with her head to the singer as he ended with the melancholy thought of the simple verses, – "Alas! your fleeting honors will fade as they."

To her the young workman suddenly showed, drawing it from within his jacket, a yellow flower, very common in Brittany, and sometimes to be found in La Brie (where, however, it is rare), –

the furze, or broom.

"Is it really you, Brigaut?" said the girl, in a low voice.

"Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am in Paris. I have started to make my way; but I'm ready to settle here, near you."

Just then the fastening of a window creaked in a room on the first floor, directly below Pierrette's attic. The girl showed the utmost terror, and said to Brigaut, quickly: —

"Run away!"

The lad jumped like a frightened frog to a bend in the street caused by the projection of a mill just where the square opens into the main thoroughfare; but in spite of his agility his hob-nailed shoes echoed on the stones with a sound easily distinguished from the music of the mill, and no doubt heard by the person who opened the window.

That person was a woman. No man would have torn himself from the comfort of a morning nap to listen to a minstrel in a jacket; none but a maid awakes to songs of love. Not only was this woman a maid, but she was an old maid. When she had opened her blinds with the furtive motion of the bat, she looked in all directions, but saw nothing, and only heard, faintly, the flying footfalls of the lad. Can there be anything more dreadful than the matutinal apparition of an ugly old maid at her window? Of all the grotesque sights which amuse the eyes of travellers in country towns, that is the most unpleasant. It is too repulsive to laugh at. This particular old maid, whose ear was so keen, was denuded of all the adventitious aids, of whatever kind, which she

employed as embellishments; her false front and her collarette were lacking; she wore that horrible little bag of black silk on which old women insist on covering their skulls, and it was now revealed beneath the night-cap which had been pushed aside in sleep. This rumpled condition gave a menacing expression to the head, such as painters bestow on witches. The temples, ears, and nape of the neck, were disclosed in all their withered horror, – the wrinkles being marked in scarlet lines that contrasted with the would-be white of the bed-gown which was tied round her neck by a narrow tape. The gaping of this garment revealed a breast to be likened only to that of an old peasant woman who cares nothing about her personal ugliness. The fleshless arm was like a stick on which a bit of stuff was hung. Seen at her window, this spinster seemed tall from the length and angularity of her face, which recalled the exaggerated proportions of certain Swiss heads. The character of their countenance – the features being marked by a total want of harmony – was that of hardness in the lines, sharpness in the tones; while an unfeeling spirit, pervading all, would have filled a physiognomist with disgust. These characteristics, fully visible at this moment, were usually modified in public by a sort of commercial smile, – a bourgeois smirk which mimicked good-humor; so that persons meeting with this old maid might very well take her for a kindly woman. She owned the house on shares with her brother. The brother, by-the-bye, was sleeping so tranquilly in his own chamber that the orchestra of the Opera-house could not have awakened him,

wonderful as its diapason is said to be.

The old maid stretched her neck out of the window, twisted it, and raised her cold, pale-blue little eyes, with their short lashes set in lids that were always rather swollen, to the attic window, endeavoring to see Pierrette. Perceiving the uselessness of that attempt, she retreated into her room with a movement like that of a tortoise which draws in its head after protruding it from its carapace. The blinds were then closed, and the silence of the street was unbroken except by peasants coming in from the country, or very early persons moving about.

When there is an old maid in a house, watch-dogs are unnecessary; not the slightest event can occur that she does not see and comment upon and pursue to its utmost consequences. The foregoing trifling circumstance was therefore destined to give rise to grave suppositions, and to open the way for one of those obscure dramas which take place in families, and are none the less terrible because they are secret, – if, indeed, we may apply the word "drama" to such domestic occurrences.

Pierrette did not go back to bed. To her, Brigaut's arrival was an immense event. During the night – that Eden of the wretched – she escaped the vexations and fault-findings she bore during the day. Like the hero of a ballad, German or Russian, I forget which, her sleep seemed to her the happy life; her waking hours a bad dream. She had just had her only pleasurable waking in three years. The memories of her childhood had sung their melodious ditties in her soul. The first couplet was heard in a dream; the

second made her spring out of bed; at the third, she doubted her ears, – the sorrowful are all disciples of Saint Thomas; but when the fourth was sung, standing in her night-gown with bare feet by the window, she recognized Brigaut, the companion of her childhood. Ah, yes! it was truly the well-known square jacket with the bobtails, the pockets of which stuck out at the hips, – the jacket of blue cloth which is classic in Brittany; there, too, were the waistcoat of printed cotton, the linen shirt fastened by a gold heart, the large rolling collar, the earrings, the stout shoes, the trousers of blue-gray drilling unevenly colored by the various lengths of the warp, – in short, all those humble, strong, and durable things which make the apparel of the Breton peasantry. The big buttons of white horn which fastened the jacket made the girl's heart beat. When she saw the bunch of broom her eyes filled with tears; then a dreadful fear drove back into her heart the happy memories that were budding there. She thought her cousin sleeping in the room beneath her might have heard the noise she made in jumping out of bed and running to the window. The fear was just; the old maid was coming, and she made Brigaut the terrified sign which the lad obeyed without the least understanding it. Such instinctive submission to a girl's bidding shows one of those innocent and absolute affections which appear from century to century on this earth, where they blossom, like the aloes of Isola Bella, twice or thrice in a hundred years. Whoever had seen the lad as he ran away would have loved the ingenuous chivalry of his most ingenuous feeling.

Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was just fifteen. Two children! Pierrette could not keep from crying as she watched his flight in the terror her gesture had conveyed to him. Then she sat down in a shabby armchair placed before a little table above which hung a mirror. She rested her elbows on the table, put her head in her hands, and sat thinking for an hour, calling to memory the Marais, the village of Pen-Hoel, the perilous voyages on a pond in a boat untied for her from an old willow by little Jacques; then the old faces of her grandfather and grandmother, the sufferings of her mother, and the handsome face of Major Brigaut, – in short, the whole of her careless childhood. It was all a dream, a luminous joy on the gloomy background of the present.

Her beautiful chestnut hair escaped in disorder from her cap, rumpled in sleep, – a cambric cap with ruffles, which she had made herself. On each side of her forehead were little ringlets escaping from gray curl-papers. From the back of her head hung a heavy braid of hair that was half unplaited. The excessive whiteness of her face betrayed that terrible malady of girlhood which goes by the name of chlorosis, deprives the body of its natural colors, destroys the appetite, and shows a disordered state of the organism. The waxy tones were in all the visible parts of her flesh. The neck and shoulders explained by their blanched paleness the wasted arms, flung forward and crossed upon the table. Her feet seemed enervated, shrunken from illness. Her night-gown came only to her knees and showed the flaccid

muscles, the blue veins, the impoverished flesh of the legs. The cold, to which she paid no heed, turned her lips violet, and a sad smile, drawing up the corners of a sensitive mouth, showed teeth that were white as ivory and quite small, – pretty, transparent teeth, in keeping with the delicate ears, the rather sharp but dainty nose, and the general outline of her face, which, in spite of its roundness, was lovely. All the animation of this charming face was in the eyes, the iris of which, brown like Spanish tobacco and flecked with black, shone with golden reflections round pupils that were brilliant and intense. Pierrette was made to be gay, but she was sad. Her lost gaiety was still to be seen in the vivacious forms of the eye, in the ingenuous grace of her brow, in the smooth curve of her chin. The long eyelashes lay upon the cheek-bones, made prominent by suffering. The paleness of her face, which was unnaturally white, made the lines and all the details infinitely pure. The ear alone was a little masterpiece of modelling, – in marble, you might say. Pierrette suffered in many ways. Perhaps you would like to know her history, and this is it.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, half-sister by the father's side of Madame Rogron, mother of the present owners of the house.

Monsieur Auffray, her husband, had married at the age of eighteen; his second marriage took place when he was nearly sixty-nine. By the first, he had an only daughter, very plain, who was married at sixteen to an innkeeper of Provins named Rogron.

By his second marriage the worthy Auffray had another

daughter; but this one was charming. There was, of course, an enormous difference in the ages of these daughters; the one by the first marriage was fifty years old when the second child was born. By this time the eldest, Madame Rogron, had two grown-up children.

The youngest daughter of the old man was married at eighteen to a man of her choice, a Breton officer named Lorrain, captain in the Imperial Guard. Love often makes a man ambitious. The captain, anxious to rise to a colonelcy, exchanged into a line regiment. While he, then a major, and his wife enjoyed themselves in Paris on the allowance made to them by Monsieur and Madame Auffray, or scoured Germany at the beck and call of the Emperor's battles and truces, old Auffray himself (formerly a grocer) died, at the age of eighty-eight, without having found time to make a will. His property was administered by his daughter, Madame Rogron, and her husband so completely in their own interests that nothing remained for the old man's widow beyond the house she lived in on the little square, and a few acres of land. This widow, the mother of Madame Lorrain, was only thirty-eight at the time of her husband's death. Like many widows, she came to the unwise decision of remarrying. She sold the house and land to her step-daughter, Madame Rogron, and married a young physician named Neraud, who wasted her whole fortune. She died of grief and misery two years later.

Thus the share of her father's property which ought to have

come to Madame Lorrain disappeared almost entirely, being reduced to the small sum of eight thousand francs. Major Lorrain was killed at the battle of Montereau, leaving his wife, then twenty-one years of age, with a little daughter of fourteen months, and no other means than the pension to which she was entitled and an eventual inheritance from her late husband's parents, Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, retail shopkeepers at Pen-Hoel, a village in the Vendee, situated in that part of it which is called the Marais. These Lorrains, grandfather and grandmother of Pierrette Lorrain, sold wood for building purposes, slates, tiles, pantiles, pipes, etc. Their business, either from their own incapacity or through ill-luck, did badly, and gave them scarcely enough to live on. The failure of the well-known firm of Collinet at Nantes, caused by the events of 1814 which led to a sudden fall in colonial products, deprived them of twenty-four thousand francs which they had just deposited with that house.

The arrival of their daughter-in-law was therefore welcome to them. Her pension of eight hundred francs was a handsome income at Pen-Hoel. The eight thousand francs which the widow's half-brother and sister Rogron sent to her from her father's estate (after a multitude of legal formalities) were placed by her in the Lorrains' business, they giving her a mortgage on a little house which they owned at Nantes, let for three hundred francs, and barely worth ten thousand.

Madame Lorrain the younger, Pierrette's mother, died in

1819. The child of old Auffray and his young wife was small, delicate, and weakly; the damp climate of the Marais did not agree with her. But her husband's family persuaded her, in order to keep her with them, that in no other quarter of the world could she find a more healthy region. She was so petted and tenderly cared for that her death, when it came, brought nothing but honor to the old Lorrains.

Some persons declared that Brigaut, an old Vendéen, one of those men of iron who served under Charette, under Mercier, under the Marquis de Montauran, and the Baron du Guenic, in the wars against the Republic, counted for a good deal in the willingness of the younger Madame Lorrain to remain in the Marais. If it were so, his soul must have been a truly loving and devoted one. All Pen-Hoel saw him – he was called respectfully Major Brigaut, the grade he had held in the Catholic army – spending his days and his evenings in the Lorrains' parlor, beside the window of the imperial major. Toward the last, the curate of Pen-Hoel made certain representations to old Madame Lorrain, begging her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, and promising to have the major appointed justice of peace for the canton of Pen-Hoel, through the influence of the Vicomte de Kergarouet. The death of the poor young woman put an end to the matter.

Pierrette was left in charge of her grandparents who owed her four hundred francs a year, interest on the little property placed in their hands. This small sum was now applied to her

maintenance. The old people, who were growing less and less fit for business, soon found themselves confronted by an active and capable competitor, against whom they said hard things, all the while doing nothing to defeat him. Major Brigaut, their friend and adviser, died six months after his friend, the younger Madame Lorrain, – perhaps of grief, perhaps of his wounds, of which he had received twenty-seven.

Like a sound merchant, the competitor set about ruining his adversaries in order to get rid of all rivalry. With his connivance, the Lorrains borrowed money on notes, which they were unable to meet, and which drove them in their old days into bankruptcy. Pierrette's claim upon the house in Nantes was superseded by the legal rights of her grandmother, who enforced them to secure the daily bread of her poor husband. The house was sold for nine thousand five hundred francs, of which one thousand five hundred went for costs. The remaining eight thousand came to Madame Lorain, who lived upon the income of them in a sort of almshouse at Nantes, like that of Sainte-Perine in Paris, called Saint-Jacques, where the two old people had bed and board for a humble payment.

As it was impossible to keep Pierrette, their ruined little granddaughter, with them, the old Lorrains bethought themselves of her uncle and aunt Rogron, in Provins, to whom they wrote. These Rogrons were dead. The letter might, therefore, have easily been lost; but if anything here below can take the place of Providence, it is the post. Postal spirit, incomparably above

public spirit, exceeds in brilliancy of resource and invention the ablest romance-writers. When the post gets hold of a letter, worth, to it, from three to ten sous, and does not immediately know where to find the person to whom that letter is addressed, it displays a financial anxiety only to be met with in very pertinacious creditors. The post goes and comes and ferrets through all the eighty-six departments. Difficulties only arouse the genius of the clerks, who may really be called men-of-letters, and who set about to search for that unknown human being with as much ardor as the mathematicians of the Bureau give to longitudes. They literally ransack the whole kingdom. At the first ray of hope all the post-offices in Paris are alert. Sometimes the receiver of a missing letter is amazed at the network of scrawled directions which covers both back and front of the missive, – glorious vouchers for the administrative persistency with which the post has been at work. If a man undertook what the post accomplishes, he would lose ten thousand francs in travel, time, and money, to recover ten sous. The letter of the old Lorrains, addressed to Monsieur Rogron of Provins (who had then been dead a year) was conveyed by the post in due time to Monsieur Rogron, son of the deceased, a mercer in the rue Saint-Denis in Paris. And this is where the postal spirit obtains its greatest triumph. An heir is always more or less anxious to know if he has picked up every scrap of his inheritance, if he has not overlooked a credit, or a trunk of old clothes. The Treasury knows that. A letter addressed to the late Rogron at Provins was certain to pique

the curiosity of Rogron, Jr., or Mademoiselle Rogron, the heirs in Paris. Out of that human interest the Treasury was able to earn sixty centimes.

These Rogrons, toward whom the old Lorrains, though dreading to part with their dear little granddaughter, stretched their supplicating hands, became, in this way, and most unexpectedly, the masters of Pierrette's destiny. It is therefore indispensable to explain both their antecedents and their character.

II

THE ROGRONS

Pere Rogron, that innkeeper of Provins to whom old Auffray had married his daughter by his first wife, was an individual with an inflamed face, a veiny nose, and cheeks on which Bacchus had drawn his scarlet and bulbous vine-marks. Though short, fat, and pot-bellied, with stout legs and thick hands, he was gifted with the shrewdness of the Swiss innkeepers, whom he resembled. Certainly he was not handsome, and his wife looked like him. Never was a couple better matched. Rogron liked good living and to be waited upon by pretty girls. He belonged to the class of egoists whose behavior is brutal; he gave way to his vices and did their will openly in the face of Israel. Grasping, selfish, without decency, and always gratifying his own fancies, he devoured his earnings until the day when his teeth failed him. Selfishness stayed by him. In his old days he sold his inn, collected (as we have seen) all he could of his late father-in-law's property, and went to live in the little house in the square of Provins, bought for a trifle from the widow of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife had about two thousand francs a year from twenty-seven lots of land in the neighborhood of Provins, and from the sale of their inn for twenty thousand. Old Auffray's house, though out of repair, was inhabited just as it was by the Rogrons, — old rats like wrack and ruin. Rogron himself took

to horticulture and spent his savings in enlarging the garden; he carried it to the river's edge between two walls and built a sort of stone embankment across the end, where aquatic nature, left to herself, displayed the charms of her flora.

In the early years of their marriage the Rogrons had a son and a daughter, both hideous; for such human beings degenerate. Put out to nurse at a low price, these luckless children came home in due time, after the worst of village training, – allowed to cry for hours after their wet-nurse, who worked in the fields, leaving them shut up to scream for her in one of those damp, dark, low rooms which serve as homes for the French peasantry. Treated thus, the features of the children coarsened; their voices grew harsh; they mortified their mother's vanity, and that made her strive to correct their bad habits by a sternness which the severity of their father converted through comparison to kindness. As a general thing, they were left to run loose about the stables and courtyards of the inn, or the streets of the town; sometimes they were whipped; sometimes they were sent, to get rid of them, to their grandfather Auffray, who did not like them. The injustice the Rogrons declared the old man did to their children, justified them to their own minds in taking the greater part of "the old scoundrel's" property. However, Rogron did send his son to school, and did buy him a man, one of his own cartmen, to save him from the conscription. As soon as his daughter, Sylvie, was thirteen, he sent her to Paris, to make her way as apprentice in a shop. Two years later he despatched his son, Jerome-Denis,

to the same career. When his friends the carriers and those who frequented the inn, asked him what he meant to do with his children, Pere Rogron explained his system with a conciseness which, in view of that of most fathers, had the merit of frankness.

"When they are old enough to understand me I shall give 'em a kick and say: 'Go and make your own way in the world!'" he replied, emptying his glass and wiping his lips with the back of his hand. Then he winked at his questioner with a knowing look. "Hey! hey! they are no greater fools than I was," he added. "My father gave me three kicks; I shall only give them one; he put one louis into my hand; I shall put ten in theirs, therefore they'll be better off than I was. That's the way to do. After I'm gone, what's left will be theirs. The notaries can find them and give it to them. What nonsense to bother one's self about children. Mine owe me their life. I've fed them, and I don't ask anything from them, – I call that quits, hey, neighbor? I began as a cartman, but that didn't prevent me marrying the daughter of that old scoundrel Auffray."

Sylvie Rogron was sent (with six hundred francs for her board) as apprentice to certain shopkeepers originally from Provins and now settled in Paris in the rue Saint-Denis. Two years later she was "at par," as they say; she earned her own living; at any rate her parents paid nothing for her. That is what is called being "at par" in the rue Saint-Denis. Sylvie had a salary of four hundred francs. At nineteen years of age she was independent. At twenty, she was the second demoiselle in the Maison Julliard,

wholesale silk dealers at the "Chinese Worm" rue Saint-Denis. The history of the sister was that of the brother. Young Jerome-Denis Rogron entered the establishment of one of the largest wholesale mercers in the same street, the Maison Guepin, at the "Three Distaffs." When Sylvie Rogron, aged twenty-one, had risen to be forewoman at a thousand francs a year Jerome-Denis, with even better luck, was head-clerk at eighteen, with a salary of twelve hundred francs.

Brother and sister met on Sundays and fete-days, which they passed in economical amusements; they dined out of Paris, and went to Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Belleville, or Vincennes. Towards the close of the year 1815 they clubbed their savings, amounting to about twenty thousand francs, earned by the sweat of their brows, and bought of Madame Guenee the property and goodwill of her celebrated shop, the "Family Sister," one of the largest retail establishments in the quarter. Sylvie kept the books and did the writing. Jerome-Denis was master and head-clerk both. In 1821, after five years' experience, competition became so fierce that it was all the brother and sister could do to carry on the business and maintain its reputation.

Though Sylvie was at this time scarcely forty, her natural ugliness, combined with hard work and a certain crabbed look (caused as much by the conformation of her features as by her cares), made her seem like a woman of fifty. At thirty-eight Jerome Rogron presented to the eyes of his customers the silliest face that ever looked over a counter. His retreating forehead,

flattened by fatigue, was marked by three long wrinkles. His grizzled hair, cut close, expressed in some indefinable way the stupidity of a cold-blooded animal. The glance of his bluish eyes had neither flame nor thought in it. His round, flat face excited no sympathy, nor even a laugh on the lips of those who might be examining the varieties of the Parisian species; on the contrary, it saddened them. He was, like his father, short and fat, but his figure lacked the latter's brutal obesity, and showed, instead, an almost ridiculous debility. His father's high color was changed in him to the livid flabbiness peculiar to persons who live in close back-shops, or in those railed cages called counting-rooms, forever tying up bundles, receiving and making change, snarling at the clerks, and repeating the same old speeches to customers.

The small amount of brains possessed by the brother and sister had been wholly absorbed in maintaining their business, in getting and keeping money, and in learning the special laws and usages of the Parisian market. Thread, needles, ribbons, pins, buttons, tailors' furnishings, in short, the enormous quantity of things which go to make up a mercer's stock, had taken all their capacity. Outside of their business they knew absolutely nothing; they were even ignorant of Paris. To them the great city was merely a region spreading around the Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow natures could see no field except the shop. They were clever enough in nagging their clerks and their young women and in proving them to blame. Their happiness lay in seeing all hands busy at the counters, exhibiting the merchandise, and

folding it up again. When they heard the six or eight voices of the young men and women glibly gabbling the consecrated phrases by which clerks reply to the remarks of customers, the day was fine to them, the weather beautiful! But on the really fine days, when the blue of the heavens brightened all Paris, and the Parisians walked about to enjoy themselves and cared for no "goods" but those they carried on their back, the day was overcast to the Rogrons. "Bad weather for sales," said that pair of imbeciles.

The skill with which Rogron could tie up a parcel made him an object of admiration to all his apprentices. He could fold and tie and see all that happened in the street and in the farthest recesses of the shop by the time he handed the parcel to his customer with a "Here it is, madame; *nothing else* to-day?" But the poor fool would have been ruined without his sister. Sylvie had common-sense and a genius for trade. She advised her brother in their purchases and would pitilessly send him to remote parts of France to save a trifle of cost. The shrewdness which all women more or less possess, not being employed in the service of her heart, had drifted into that of speculation. A business to pay for, – that thought was the mainspring which kept the machine going and gave it an infernal activity.

Rogron was really only head-clerk; he understood nothing of his business as a whole; self-interest, that great motor of the mind, had failed in his case to instruct him. He was often aghast when his sister ordered some article to be sold below cost,

foreseeing the end of its fashion; later he admired her idiotically for her cleverness. He reasoned neither ill nor well; he was simply incapable of reasoning at all; but he had the sense to subordinate himself to his sister, and he did so from a consideration that was outside of the business. "She is my elder," he said. Perhaps an existence like his, always solitary, reduced to the satisfaction of mere needs, deprived of money and all pleasures in youth, may explain to physiologists and thinkers the clownish expression of the face, the feebleness of mind, the vacant silliness of the man. His sister had steadily prevented him from marrying, afraid perhaps to lose her power over him, and seeing only a source of expense and injury in some woman who would certainly be younger and undoubtedly less ugly than herself.

Silliness has two ways of comporting itself; it talks, or is silent. Silent silliness can be borne; but Rogron's silliness was loquacious. The man had a habit of chattering to his clerks, explaining the minutiae of the business, and ornamenting his talk with those flat jokes which may be called the "chaff" of shopkeeping. Rogron, listened to, of course, by his subordinates and perfectly satisfied with himself, had come at last into possession of a phraseology of his own. This chatterer believed himself an orator. The necessity of explaining to customers what they want, of guessing at their desires, and giving them desires for what they do not want, exercises the tongue of all retail shopkeepers. The petty dealer acquires the faculty of uttering words and sentences in which there is absolutely no meaning,

but which have a marked success. He explains to his customers matters of manufacture that they know nothing of; that alone gives him a passing superiority over them; but take him away from his thousand and one explanations about his thousand and one articles, and he is, relatively to thought, like a fish out of water in the sun.

Rogron and Sylvie, two mechanisms baptized by mistake, did not possess, latent or active, the feelings which give life to the heart. Their natures were shrivelled and harsh, hardened by toil, by privation, by the remembrance of their sufferings during a long and cruel apprenticeship to life. Neither of them complained of their trials. They were not so much implacable as impracticable in their dealings with others in misfortune. To them, virtue, honor, loyalty, all human sentiments consisted solely in the payment of their bills. Irritable and irritating, without feelings, and sordid in their economy, the brother and sister bore a dreadful reputation among the other merchants of the rue Saint-Denis. Had it not been for their connection with Provins, where they went three or four times a year, when they could close the shop for a day or two, they would have had no clerks or young women. But old Rogron, their father, sent them all the unfortunate young people of his neighborhood, whose parents wished to start them in business in Paris. He obtained these apprentices by boasting, out of vanity, of his son's success. Parents, attracted by the prospect of their children being well-trained and closely watched, and also, by the hope of their

succeeding, eventually, to the business, sent whichever child was most in the way at home to the care of the brother and sister. But no sooner had the clerks or the young women found a way of escape from that dreadful establishment than they fled, with rejoicings that increased the already bad name of the Rogrons. New victims were supplied yearly by the indefatigable old father.

From the time she was fifteen, Sylvie Rogron, trained to the simpering of a saleswoman, had two faces, – the amiable face of the seller, the natural face of a sour spinster. Her acquired countenance was a marvellous bit of mimicry. She was all smiles. Her voice, soft and wheedling, gave a commercial charm to business. Her real face was that we have already seen projecting from the half-opened blinds; the mere sight of her would have put to flight the most resolute Cossack of 1815, much as that horde were said to like all kinds of Frenchwomen.

When the letter from the Lorrains reached the brother and sister, they were in mourning for their father, from whom they inherited the house which had been as good as stolen from Pierrette's grandmother, also certain lands bought by their father, and certain moneys acquired by usurious loans and mortgages to the peasantry, whose bits of ground the old drunkard expected to possess. The yearly taking of stock was just over. The price of the "Family Sister" had, at last, been paid in full. The Rogrons owned about sixty thousand francs' worth of merchandise, forty thousand in a bank or in their cash-box, and the value of their business. Sitting on a bench covered with striped-green

Utrecht velvet placed in a square recess just behind their private counter (the counter of their forewoman being similar and directly opposite) the brother and sister consulted as to what they should do. All retail shopkeepers aspire to become members of the bourgeoisie. By selling the good-will of their business, the pair would have over a hundred and fifty thousand francs, not counting the inheritance from their father. By placing their present available property in the public Funds, they would each obtain about four thousand francs a year, and by taking the proceeds of their business, when sold, they could repair and improve the house they inherited from their father, which would thus be a good investment. They could then go and live in a house of their own in Provins. Their forewoman was the daughter of a rich farmer at Donnemarie, burdened with nine children, to whom he had endeavored to give a good start in life, being aware that at his death his property, divided into nine parts, would be but little for any one of them. In five years, however, the man had lost seven children, – a fact which made the forewoman so interesting that Rogron had tried, unsuccessfully, to get her to marry him; but she showed an aversion for her master which baffled his manoeuvres. Besides, Mademoiselle Sylvie was not in favor of the match; in fact, she steadily opposed her brother's marriage, and sought, instead, to make the shrewd young woman their successor.

No passing observer can form the least idea of the cryptogramic existence of a certain class of shopkeepers; he

looks at them and asks himself, "On what, and why, do they live? whence have they come? where do they go?" He is lost in such questions, but finds no answer to them. To discover the false seed of poesy which lies in those heads and fructifies in those lives, it is necessary to dig into them; and when we do that we soon come to a thin subsoil beneath the surface. The Parisian shopkeeper nurtures his soul on some hope or other, more or less attainable, without which he would doubtless perish. One dreams of building or managing a theatre; another longs for the honors of mayoralty; this one desires a country-house, ten miles from Paris with a so-called "park," which he will adorn with statues of tinted plaster and fountains which squirt mere threads of water, but on which he will spend a mint of money; others, again, dream of distinction and a high grade in the National Guard. Provins, that terrestrial paradise, filled the brother and sister with the fanatical longings which all the lovely towns of France inspire in their inhabitants. Let us say it to the glory of La Champagne, this love is warranted. Provins, one of the most charming towns in all France, rivals Frangistan and the valley of Cashmere; not only does it contain the poesy of Saadi, the Persian Homer, but it offers many pharmaceutical treasures to medical science. The crusades brought roses from Jericho to this enchanting valley, where by chance they gained new charms while losing none of their colors. The Provins roses are known the world over. But Provins is not only the French Persia, it is also Baden, Aix, Cheltenham, – for it has medicinal springs. This was the spot

which appeared from time to time before the eyes of the two shopkeepers in the muddy regions of Saint-Denis.

After crossing the gray plains which lie between La Ferte-Gaucher and Provins, a desert and yet productive, a desert of wheat, you reach a hill. Suddenly you behold at your feet a town watered by two rivers; at the feet of the rock on which you stand stretches a verdant valley, full of enchanting lines and fugitive horizons. If you come from Paris you will pass through the whole length of Provins on the everlasting highroad of France, which here skirts the hillside and is encumbered with beggars and blind men, who will follow you with their pitiful voices while you try to examine the unexpected picturesqueness of the region. If you come from Troyes you will approach the town on the valley side. The chateau, the old town, and its former ramparts are terraced on the hillside, the new town is below. They go by the names of Upper and Lower Provins. The upper is an airy town with steep streets commanding fine views, surrounded by sunken road-ways and ravines filled with chestnut trees which gash the sides of the hill with their deep gulleys. The upper town is silent, clean, solemn, surmounted by the imposing ruins of the old chateau. The lower is a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two rivers of Brie, narrow, sluggish, and deep; a town of inns, shops, retired merchants; filled with diligences, travelling-carriages, and waggons. The two towns, or rather this town with its historical memories, its melancholy ruins, the gaiety of its valley, the romantic charm of its ravines

filled with tangled shrubbery and wildflowers, its rivers banked with gardens, excites the love of all its children, who do as the Auvergnats, the Savoyards, in fact, all French folks do, namely, leave Provins to make their fortunes, and always return. "Die in one's form," the proverb made for hares and faithful souls, seems also the motto of a Provins native.

Thus the two Rogrons thought constantly of their dear Provins. While Jerome sold his thread he saw the Upper town; as he piled up the cards on which were buttons he contemplated the valley; when he rolled and unrolled his ribbons he followed the shining rivers. Looking up at his shelves he saw the ravines where he had often escaped his father's anger and gone a-nutting or gathering blackberries. But the little square in the Lower town was the chief object of his thoughts; he imagined how he could improve his house: he dreamed of a new front, new bedrooms, a salon, a billiard-room, a dining-room, and the kitchen garden out of which he would make an English pleasure-ground, with lawns, grottos, fountains, and statuary. The bedrooms at present occupied by the brother and sister, on the second floor of a house with three windows front and six storeys high in the rue Saint-Denis, were furnished with the merest necessities, yet no one in Paris had finer furniture than they – in fancy. When Jerome walked the streets he stopped short, struck with admiration at the handsome things in the upholsterers' windows, and at the draperies he coveted for his house. When he came home he would say to his sister: "I found in such a shop, such and such a

piece of furniture that will just do for the salon." The next day he would buy another piece, and another, and so on. He rejected, the following month, the articles of the months before. The Budget itself, could not have paid for his architectural schemes. He wanted everything he saw, but abandoned each thing for the last thing. When he saw the balconies of new houses, when he studied external ornamentation, he thought all such things, mouldings, carvings, etc., out of place in Paris. "Ah!" he would say, "those fine things would look much better at Provins." When he stood on his doorstep leaning against the lintel, digesting his morning meal, with a vacant eye, the mercer was gazing at the house of his fancy gilded by the sun of his dream; he walked in his garden; he heard the jet from his fountain falling in pearly drops upon a slab of limestone; he played on his own billiard-table; he gathered his own flowers.

Sylvie, on the other hand, was thinking so deeply, pen in hand, that she forgot to scold the clerks; she was receiving the bourgeoisie of Provins, she was looking at herself in the mirrors of her salon, and admiring the beauties of a marvellous cap. The brother and sister began to think the atmosphere of the rue Saint-Denis unhealthy, and the smell of the mud in the markets made them long for the fragrance of the Provins roses. They were the victims of a genuine nostalgia, and also of a monomania, frustrated at present by the necessity of selling their tapes and bobbins before they could leave Paris. The promised land of the valley of Provins attracted these Hebrews all the more because

they had really suffered, and for a long time, as they crossed breathlessly the sandy wastes of a mercer's business.

The Lorrains' letter reached them in the midst of meditations inspired by this glorious future. They knew scarcely anything about their cousin, Pierrette Lorrain. Their father got possession of the Auffray property after they left home, and the old man said little to any one of his business affairs. They hardly remembered their aunt Lorrain. It took an hour of genealogical discussion before they made her out to be the younger sister of their own mother by the second marriage of their grandfather Auffray. It immediately struck them that this second marriage had been fatally injurious to their interests by dividing the Auffray property between two daughters. In times past they had heard their father, who was given to sneering, complain of it.

The brother and sister considered the application of the Lorrains from the point of view of such reminiscences, which were not at all favorable for Pierrette. To take charge of an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who might become their legal heir in case neither of them married, – this was a matter that needed discussion. The question was considered and debated under all its aspects. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. Then, what a trouble it would be to have a young girl to look after. Wouldn't it commit them to some obligations towards her? Could they send the girl away if they did not like her? Besides, wouldn't they have to marry her? and if Jerome found a yoke-mate among the heiresses of Provins they ought to keep all their property for

his children. A yokemate for Jerome, according to Sylvie, meant a stupid, rich and ugly girl who would let herself be governed. They decided to refuse the Lorrain request. Sylvie agreed to write the answer. Business being rather urgent just then she delayed writing, and the forewoman coming forward with an offer for the stock and good-will of the "Family Sister," which the brother and sister accepted, the matter went entirely out of the old maid's mind.

Sylvie Rogron and her brother departed for Provins four years before the time when the coming of Brigaut threw such excitement into Pierrette's life. But the doings of the pair after their arrival at Provins are as necessary to relate as their life in Paris; for Provins was destined to be not less fatal to Pierrette than the commercial antecedents of her cousins!

III

PATHOLOGY OF RETIRED MERCERS

When the petty shopkeeper who has come to Paris from the provinces returns to the provinces from Paris he brings with him a few ideas; then he loses them in the habits and ways of provincial life into which he plunges, and his reforming notions leave him. From this there do result, however, certain trifling, slow, successive changes by which Paris scratches the surface of the provincial towns. This process marks the transition of the ex-shopkeeper into the substantial bourgeois, but it acts like an illness upon him. No retail shopkeeper can pass with impunity from his perpetual chatter into dead silence, from his Parisian activity to the stillness of provincial life. When these worthy persons have laid by property they spend a portion of it on some desire over which they have long brooded and into which they now turn their remaining impulses, no longer restrained by force of will. Those who have not been nursing a fixed idea either travel or rush into the political interests of their municipality. Others take to hunting or fishing and torment their farmers or tenants; others again become usurers or stock-jobbers. As for the scheme of the Rogrons, brother and sister, we know what that was; they had to satisfy an imperious desire to handle the trowel

and remodel their old house into a charming new one.

This fixed idea produced upon the square of Lower Provins the front of the building which Brigaut had been examining; also the interior arrangements of the house and its handsome furniture. The contractor did not drive a nail without consulting the owners, without requiring them to sign the plans and specifications, without explaining to them at full length and in every detail the nature of each article under discussion, where it was manufactured, and what were its various prices. As to the choicer things, each, they were told, had been used by Monsieur Tiphaine, or Madame Julliard, or Monsieur the mayor, the notables of the place. The idea of having things done as the rich bourgeois of Provins did them carried the day for the contractor.

"Oh, if Monsieur Garceland has it in his house, put it in," said Mademoiselle Rogron. "It must be all right; his taste is good."

"Sylvie, see, he wants us to have ovolos in the cornice of the corridor."

"Do you call those ovolos?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"What an odd name! I never heard it before."

"But you have seen the thing?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand Latin?"

"No."

"Well, it means eggs – from the Latin *ovum*."

"What queer fellows you are, you architects!" cried Rogron. "It is stepping on egg-shells to deal with you."

"Shall we paint the corridor?" asked the builder.

"Good heavens, no!" cried Sylvie. "That would be five hundred francs more!"

"Oh, but the salon and the staircase are too pretty not to have the corridor decorated too," said the man. "That little Madame Lesourd had hers painted last year."

"And now, her husband, as king's attorney, is obliged to leave Provins."

"Ah, he'll be chief justice some of these days," said the builder.

"How about Monsieur Tiphaine?"

"Monsieur Tiphaine? he's got a pretty wife and is sure to get on.

He'll go to Paris. Shall we paint the corridor?"

"Yes, yes," said Rogron. "The Lesourds must be made to see that we are as good as they."

The first year after the Rogrons returned to Provins was entirely taken up by such discussions, by the pleasure of watching the workmen, by the surprise occasioned to the townspeople and the replies to questions of all kinds which resulted therefrom, and also by the attempts made by Sylvie and her brother to be socially intimate with the principal families of Provins.

The Rogrons had never gone into any society; they had never left their shop, knowing absolutely no one in Paris, and now

they were athirst for the pleasures of social life. On their arrival in Provins they found their former masters in Paris (long since returned to the provinces), Monsieur and Madame Julliard, lately of the "Chinese Worm," their children and grandchildren; the Guepin family, or rather the Guepin clan, the youngest scion of which now kept the "Three Distaffs"; and thirdly, Madame Guenee from whom they had purchased the "Family Sister," and whose three daughters were married and settled in Provins. These three races, Julliard, Guepin, and Guenee, had spread through the town like dog-grass through a lawn. The mayor, Monsieur Garceland, was the son-in-law of Monsieur Guepin; the curate, Abbe Peroux, was own brother to Madame Julliard; the judge, Monsieur Tiphaine junior, was brother to Madame Guenee, who signed herself "*nee* Tiphaine."

The queen of the town was the beautiful Madame Tiphaine junior, only daughter of Madame Roguin, the rich wife of a former notary in Paris, whose name was never mentioned. Clever, delicate, and pretty, married in the provinces to please her mother, who for special reasons did not want her with her, and took her from a convent only a few days before the wedding, Melanie Tiphaine considered herself an exile in Provins, where she behaved to admiration. Handsomely dowered, she still had hopes. As for Monsieur Tiphaine, his old father had made to his eldest daughter Madame Guenee such advances on her inheritance that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, situated within fifteen miles of Provins, was to come wholly

to him. Consequently the Tiphaines would possess, sooner or later, some forty thousand francs a year, and were not "badly off," as they say. The one overwhelming desire of the beautiful Madame Tiphaine was to get Monsieur Tiphaine elected deputy. As deputy he would become a judge in Paris; and she was firmly resolved to push him up into the Royal courts. For these reasons she tickled all vanities and strove to please all parties; and – what is far more difficult – she succeeded. Twice a week she received the bourgeoisie of Provins at her house in the Upper town. This intelligent young woman of twenty had not as yet made a single blunder or misstep on the slippery path she had taken. She gratified everybody's self-love, and petted their hobbies; serious with the serious, a girl with girls, instinctively a mother with mothers, gay with young wives and disposed to help them, gracious to all, – in short, a pearl, a treasure, the pride of Provins. She had never yet said a word of her intentions and wishes, but all the electors of Provins were awaiting the time when their dear Monsieur Tiphaine had reached the required age for nomination. Every man in the place, certain of his own talents, regarded the future deputy as his particular friend, his protector. Of course, Monsieur Tiphaine would attain to honors; he would be Keeper of the Seals, and then, what wouldn't he do for Provins!

Such were the pleasant means by which Madame Tiphaine had come to rule over the little town. Madame Guenee, Monsieur Tiphaine's sister, after having married her eldest daughter to Monsieur Lesourd, prosecuting attorney, her second to Monsieur

Martener, the doctor, and the third to Monsieur Auffray, the notary, had herself married Monsieur Galardon, the collector. Mother and daughters all considered Monsieur Tiphaine as the richest and ablest man in the family. The prosecuting attorney had the strongest interest in sending his uncle to Paris, expecting to step into his shoes as judge of the local court of Provins. The four ladies formed a sort of court round Madame Tiphaine, whose ideas and advice they followed on all occasions. Monsieur Julliard, the eldest son of the old merchant, who had married the only daughter of a rich farmer, set up a sudden, secret, and disinterested passion for Madame Tiphaine, that angel descended from the Parisian skies. The clever Melanie, too clever to involve herself with Julliard, but quite capable of keeping him in the condition of Amadis and making the most of his folly, advised him to start a journal, intending herself to play the part of Egeria. For the last two years, therefore, Julliard, possessed by his romantic passion, had published the said newspaper, called the "Bee-hive," which contained articles literary, archaeological, and medical, written in the family. The advertisements paid expenses. The subscriptions, two hundred in all, made the profits. Every now and then melancholy verses, totally incomprehensible in La Brie, appeared, addressed, "TO HER!!!" with three exclamation marks. The clan Julliard was thus united to the other clans, and the salon of Madame Tiphaine became, naturally, the first in the town. The few aristocrats who lived in Provins were, of course, apart, and formed a single salon

in the Upper town, at the house of the old Comtesse de Breautey.

During the first six months of their transplantation, the Rogrons, favored by their former acquaintance with several of these people, were received, first by Madame Julliard the elder, and by the former Madame Guenee, now Madame Galardon (from whom they had bought their business), and next, after a good deal of difficulty, by Madame Tiphaine. All parties wished to study the Rogrons before admitting them. It was difficult, of course, to keep out merchants of the rue Saint-Denis, originally from Provins, who had returned to the town to spend their fortunes. Still, the object of all society is to amalgamate persons of equal wealth, education, manners, customs, accomplishments, and character. Now the Guepins, Guenees, and Julliards had a better position among the bourgeoisie than the Rogrons, whose father had been held in contempt on account of his private life, and his conduct in the matter of the Auffray property, – the facts of which were known to the notary Auffray, Madame Galardon's son-in-law.

In the social life of these people, to which Madame Tiphaine had given a certain tone of elegance, all was homogeneous; the component parts understood each other, knew each other's characters, and behaved and conversed in a manner that was agreeable to all. The Rogrons flattered themselves that being received by Monsieur Garceland, the mayor, they would soon be on good terms with all the best families in the town. Sylvie applied herself to learn boston. Rogron, incapable of playing

a game, twirled his thumbs and had nothing to say except to discourse on his new house. Words seemed to choke him; he would get up, try to speak, become frightened, and sit down again, with comical distortion of the lips. Sylvie naively betrayed her natural self at cards. Sharp, irritable, whining when she lost, insolent when she won, nagging and quarrelsome, she annoyed her partners as much as her adversaries, and became the scourge of society. And yet, possessed by a silly, unconcealed ambition, Rogron and his sister were bent on playing a part in the society of a little town already in possession of a close corporation of twelve allied families. Allowing that the restoration of their house had cost them thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister possessed between them at least ten thousand francs a year. This they considered wealth, and with it they endeavored to impress society, which immediately took the measure of their vulgarity, crass ignorance, and foolish envy. On the evening when they were presented to the beautiful Madame Tiphaine, who had already eyed them at Madame Garceland's and at Madame Julliard the elder's, the queen of the town remarked to Julliard junior, who stayed a few moments after the rest of the company to talk with her and her husband: —

"You all seem to be taken with those Rogrons."

"No, no," said Amadis, "they bore my mother and annoy my wife. When Mademoiselle Sylvie was apprenticed, thirty years ago, to my father, none of them could endure her."

"I have a great mind," said Madame Tiphaine, putting her

pretty foot on the bar of the fender, "to make it understood that my salon is not an inn."

Julliard raised his eyes to the ceiling, as if to say, "Good heavens? what wit, what intellect!"

"I wish my society to be select; and it certainly will not be if I admit those Rogrons."

"They have neither heart, nor mind, nor manners"; said Monsieur Tiphaine. "If, after selling thread for twenty years, as my sister did for example – "

"Your sister, my dear," said his wife in a parenthesis, "cannot be out of place in any salon."

" – if," he continued, "people are stupid enough not to throw off the shop and polish their manners, if they don't know any better than to mistake the Counts of Champagne for the *accounts* of a wine-shop, as Rogron did this evening, they had better, in my opinion, stay at home."

"They are simply impudent," said Julliard. "To hear them talk you would suppose there was no other handsome house in Provins but theirs. They want to crush us; and after all, they have hardly enough to live on."

"If it was only the brother," said Madame Tiphaine, "one might put up with him; he is not so aggressive. Give him a Chinese puzzle and he will stay in a corner quietly enough; it would take him a whole winter to find it out. But Mademoiselle Sylvie, with that voice like a hoarse hyena and those lobster-claws of hands! Don't repeat all this, Julliard."

When Julliard had departed the little woman said to her husband: —

"I have aborigines enough whom I am forced to receive; these two will fairly kill me. With your permission, I shall deprive myself of their society."

"You are mistress in your own house," replied he; "but that will make enemies. The Rogrons will fling themselves into the opposition, which hitherto has had no real strength in Provins. That Rogron is already intimate with Baron Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet."

"Then," said Melanie, laughing, "they will do you some service. Where there are no opponents, there is no triumph. A liberal conspiracy, an illegal cabal, a struggle of any kind, will bring you into the foreground."

The justice looked at his young wife with a sort of alarmed admiration.

The next day it was whispered about that the Rogrons had not altogether succeeded in Madame Tiphaine's salon. That lady's speech about an inn was immensely admired. It was a whole month before she returned Mademoiselle Sylvie's visit. Insolence of this kind is very much noticed in the provinces.

During the evening which Sylvie had spent at Madame Tiphaine's a disagreeable scene occurred between herself and old Madame Julliard while playing boston, apropos of a trick which Sylvie declared the old lady had made her lose on purpose; for the old maid, who liked to trip others, could never endure the

same game on herself. The next time she was invited out the mistress took care to make up the card-tables before she arrived; so that Sylvie was reduced to wandering from table to table as an onlooker, the players glancing at her with scornful eyes. At Madame Julliard senior's house, they played whist, a game Sylvie did not know.

The old maid at last understood that she was under a ban; but she had no conception of the reason of it. She fancied herself an object of jealousy to all these persons. After a time she and her brother received no invitations, but they still persisted in paying evening visits. Satirical persons made fun of them, – not spitefully, but amusingly; inveigling them to talk absurdly about the eggs in their cornice, and their wonderful cellar of wine, the like of which was not in Provins.

Before long the Rogron house was completely finished, and the brother and sister then resolved to give several sumptuous dinners, as much to return the civilities they had received as to exhibit their luxury. The invited guests accepted from curiosity only. The first dinner was given to the leading personages of the town; to Monsieur and Madame Tiphaine, with whom, however the Rogrons had never dined; to Monsieur and Madame Julliard, senior and junior; to Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur le cure, and Monsieur and Madame Galardon. It was one of those interminable provincial dinners, where you sit at table from five to nine o'clock. Madame Tiphaine had introduced into Provins the Parisian custom of taking leave as soon as coffee had been

served. On this occasion she had company at home and was anxious to get away. The Rogrons accompanied her husband and herself to the street door, and when they returned to the salon, disconcerted at not being able to keep their chief guests, the rest of the party were preparing to imitate Madame Tiphaine's fashion with cruel provincial promptness.

"They won't see our salon lighted up," said Sylvie, "and that's the show of the house."

The Rogrons had counted on surprising their guests. It was the first time any one had been admitted to the now celebrated house, and the company assembled at Madame Tiphaine's was eagerly awaiting her opinion of the marvels of the "Rogron palace."

"Well!" cried little Madame Martener, "you've seen the Louvre; tell us all about it."

"All? Well, it would be like the dinner, – not much."

"But do describe it."

"Well, to begin with, that front door, the gilded grating of which we have all admired," said Madame Tiphaine, "opens upon a long corridor which divides the house unequally; on the right side there is one window, on the other, two. At the garden end, the corridor opens with a glass door upon a portico with steps to the lawn, where there's a sun dial and a plaster statue of Spartacus, painted to imitate bronze. Behind the kitchen, the builder has put the staircase, and a sort of larder which we are spared the sight of. The staircase, painted to imitate black marble with yellow veins, turns upon itself like those you see in cafes

leading from the ground-floor to the entresol. The balustrade, of walnut with brass ornaments and dangerously slight, was pointed out to us as one of the seven wonders of the world. The cellar stairs run under it. On the other side of the corridor is the dining-room, which communicates by folding-doors with a salon of equal size, the windows of which look on the garden."

"Dear me, is there no ante-chamber?" asked Madame Auffray.

"The corridor, full of draughts, answers for an ante-chamber," replied Madame Tiphaine. "Our friends have had, they assured us, the eminently national, liberal, constitutional, and patriotic feeling to use none but French woods in the house; so the floor in the dining-room is chestnut, the sideboards, tables, and chairs, of the same. White calico window-curtains, with red borders, are held back by vulgar red straps; these magnificent draperies run on wooden curtain rods ending in brass lion's-paws. Above one of the sideboards hangs a dial suspended by a sort of napkin in gilded bronze, – an idea that seemed to please the Rogrons hugely. They tried to make me admire the invention; all I could manage to say was that if it was ever proper to wrap a napkin round a dial it was certainly in a dining-room. On the sideboard were two huge lamps like those on the counter of a restaurant. Above the other sideboard hung a barometer, excessively ornate, which seems to play a great part in their existence; Rogron gazed at it as he might at his future wife. Between the two windows is a white porcelain stove in a niche overloaded with ornament. The

walls glow with a magnificent paper, crimson and gold, such as you see in the same restaurants, where, no doubt, the Rogrons chose it. Dinner was served on white and gold china, with a dessert service of light blue with green flowers, but they showed us another service in earthenware for everyday use. Opposite to each sideboard was a large cupboard containing linen. All was clean, new, and horribly sharp in tone. However, I admit the dining-room; it has some character, though disagreeable; it represents that of the masters of the house. But there is no enduring the five engravings that hang on the walls; the Minister of the Interior ought really to frame a law against them. One was Poniatowski jumping into the Elster; the others, Napoleon pointing a cannon, the defence at Clichy, and the two Mazepas, all in gilt frames of the vulgarest description, – fit to carry off the prize of disgust. Oh! how much I prefer Madame Julliard's pastels of fruit, those excellent Louis XV. pastels, which are in keeping with the old dining-room and its gray panels, – defaced by age, it is true, but they possess the true provincial characteristics that go well with old family silver, precious china, and our simple habits. The provinces are provinces; they are only ridiculous when they mimic Paris. I prefer this old salon of my husband's forefathers, with its heavy curtains of green and white damask, the Louis XV. mantelpiece, the twisted pier-glasses, the old mirrors with their beaded mouldings, and the venerable card tables. Yes, I prefer my old Sevres vases in royal blue, mounted on copper, my clock with those impossible flowers, that rococco

chandelier, and the tapestried furniture, to all the finery of the Rogron salon."

"What is the salon like?" said Monsieur Martener, delighted with the praise the handsome Parisian bestowed so adroitly on the provinces.

"As for the salon, it is all red, – the red Mademoiselle Sylvie turns when she loses at cards."

"Sylvan-red," said Monsieur Tiphaine, whose sparkling saying long remained in the vocabulary of Provins.

"Window-curtains, red; furniture, red; mantelpiece, red, veined yellow, candelabra and clock ditto mounted on bronze, common and heavy in design, – Roman standards with Greek foliage! Above the clock is that inevitable good-natured lion which looks at you with a simper, the lion of ornamentation, with a big ball under his feet, symbol of the decorative lion, who passes his life holding a black ball, – exactly like a deputy of the Left. Perhaps it is meant as a constitutional myth. The face of the clock is curious. The glass over the chimney is framed in that new fashion of applied mouldings which is so trumpery and vulgar. From the ceiling hangs a chandelier carefully wrapped in green muslin, and rightly too, for it is in the worst taste, the sharpest tint of bronze with hideous ornaments. The walls are covered with a red flock paper to imitate velvet enclosed in panels, each panel decorated with a chromo-lithograph in one of those frames festooned with stucco flowers to represent wood-carving. The furniture, in cashmere and elm-wood, consists, with

classic uniformity, of two sofas, two easy-chairs, two armchairs, and six common chairs. A vase in alabaster, called a la Medicis, kept under glass stands on a table between the windows; before the windows, which are draped with magnificent red silk curtains and lace curtains under them, are card-tables. The carpet is Aubusson, and you may be sure the Rogrons did not fail to lay hands on that most vulgar of patterns, large flowers on a red ground. The room looks as if no one ever lived there; there are no books, no engravings, none of those little knick-knacks we all have lying about," added Madame Tiphaine, glancing at her own table covered with fashionable trifles, albums, and little presents given to her by friends; "and there are no flowers, – it is all cold and barren, like Mademoiselle Sylvie herself. Buffon says the style is the man, and certainly salons have styles of their own."

From this sketch everybody can see the sort of house the brother and sister lived in, though they can never imagine the absurdities into which a clever builder dragged the ignorant pair, – new inventions, fantastic ornaments, a system for preventing smoky chimneys, another for preventing damp walls; painted marquetry panels on the staircase, colored glass, superfine locks, – in short, all those vulgarities which make a house expensive and gratify the bourgeois taste.

No one chose to visit the Rogrons, whose social plans thus came to nothing. Their invitations were refused under various excuses, – the evenings were already engaged to Madame Garceland and the other ladies of the Provins world. The Rogrons

had supposed that all that was required to gain a position in society was to give a few dinners. But no one any longer accepted them, except a few young men who went to make fun of their host and hostess, and certain diners-out who went everywhere.

Frightened at the loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up without profit in what she called her "dear house," Sylvie now set to work to recover it by economy. She gave no more dinners, which had cost her forty or fifty francs without the wines, and did not fulfil her social hopes, hopes that are as hard to realize in the provinces as in Paris. She sent away her cook, took a country-girl to do the menial work, and did her own cooking, as she said, "for pleasure."

Fourteen months after their return to Provins, the brother and sister had fallen into a solitary and wholly unoccupied condition. Their banishment from society roused in Sylvie's heart a dreadful hatred against the Tiphaines, Julliards and all the other members of the social world of Provins, which she called "the clique," and with whom her personal relations became extremely cold. She would gladly have set up a rival clique, but the lesser bourgeoisie was made up of either small shopkeepers who were only free on Sundays and fete-days, or smirched individuals like the lawyer Vinet and Doctor Neraud, and wholly inadmissible Bonapartists like Baron Gouraud, with whom, however, Rogron thoughtlessly allied himself, though the upper bourgeoisie had warned him against them.

The brother and sister were, therefore, forced to sit by the

fire of the stove in the dining-room, talking over their former business, trying to recall the faces of their customers and other matters they had intended to forget. By the end of the second winter ennui weighed heavily on them. They did not know how to get through each day; sometimes as they went to bed the words escaped them, "There's another over!" They dragged out the morning by staying in bed, and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every day, examined his face, consulted his sister on any changes he thought he saw there, argued with the servant about the temperature of his hot water, wandered into the garden, looked to see if the shrubs were budding, sat at the edge of the water where he had built himself a kiosk, examined the joinery of his house, – had it sprung? had the walls settled, the panels cracked? or he would come in fretting about a sick hen, and complaining to his sister, who was nagging the servant as she set the table, of the dampness which was coming out in spots upon the plaster. The barometer was Rogron's most useful bit of property. He consulted it at all hours, tapped it familiarly like a friend, saying: "Vile weather!" to which his sister would reply, "Pooh! it is only seasonable." If any one called to see him the excellence of that instrument was his chief topic of conversation.

Breakfast took up some little time; with what deliberation those two human beings masticated their food! Their digestions were perfect; cancer of the stomach was not to be dreaded by them. They managed to get along till twelve o'clock by reading the "Bee-hive" and the "Constitutionnel." The cost of subscribing

to the Parisian paper was shared by Vinet the lawyer, and Baron Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the paper to Gouraud, who had been a colonel and lived on the square, and whose long yarns were Rogron's delight; the latter sometimes puzzled over the warnings he had received, and asked himself how such a lively companion could be dangerous. He was fool enough to tell the colonel he had been warned against him, and to repeat all the "clique" had said. God knows how the colonel, who feared no one, and was equally to be dreaded with pistols or a sword, gave tongue about Madame Tiphaine and her Amadis, and the ministerialists of the Upper town, persons capable of any villany to get places, and who counted the votes at elections to suit themselves, etc.

About two o'clock Rogron started for a little walk. He was quite happy if some shopkeeper standing on the threshold of his door would stop him and say, "Well, pere Rogron, how goes it with *you*?" Then he would talk, and ask for news, and gather all the gossip of the town. He usually went as far as the Upper town, sometimes to the ravines, according to the weather. Occasionally he would meet old men taking their walks abroad like himself. Such meetings were joyful events to him. There happened to be in Provins a few men weary of Parisian life, quiet scholars who lived with their books. Fancy the bewilderment of the ignorant Rogron when he heard a deputy-judge named Desfondrilles, more of an archaeologist than a magistrate, saying to old Monsieur Martener, a really learned man, as he pointed to the valley: —

"Explain to me why the idlers of Europe go to Spa instead of coming to Provins, when the springs here have a superior curative value recognized by the French faculty, – a potential worthy of the medicinal properties of our roses."

"That is one of the caprices of caprice," said the old gentleman. "Bordeaux wine was unknown a hundred years ago. Marechal de Richelieu, one of the noted men of the last century, the French Alcibiades, was appointed governor of Guyenne. His lungs were diseased, and, heaven knows why! the wine of the country did him good and he recovered. Bordeaux instantly made a hundred millions; the marshal widened its territory to Angouleme, to Cahors, – in short, to over a hundred miles of circumference! it is hard to tell where the Bordeaux vineyards end. And yet they haven't erected an equestrian statue to the marshal in Bordeaux!"

"Ah! if anything of that kind happens to Provins," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, "let us hope that somewhere in the Upper or Lower town they will set up a bas-relief of the head of Monsieur Opoix, the re-discoverer of the mineral waters of Provins."

"My dear friend, the revival of Provins is impossible," replied Monsieur Martener; "the town was made bankrupt long ago."

"What!" cried Rogron, opening his eyes very wide.

"It was once a capital, holding its own against Paris in the twelfth century, when the Comtes de Champagne held their court here, just as King Rene held his in Provence," replied the

man of learning; "for in those days civilization, gaiety, poesy, elegance, and women, in short all social splendors, were not found exclusively in Paris. It is as difficult for towns and cities as it is for commercial houses to recover from ruin. Nothing is left to us of the old Provins but the fragrance of our historical glory and that of our roses, – and a sub-prefecture!"

"Ah! what mightn't France be if she had only preserved her feudal capitals!" said Desfondrilles. "Can sub-prefects replace the poetic, gallant, warlike race of the Thibaults who made Provins what Ferrara was to Italy, Weimar to Germany, – what Munich is trying to be to-day."

"Was Provins ever a capital?" asked Rogron.

"Why! where do you come from?" exclaimed the archaeologist. "Don't you know," he added, striking the ground of the Upper town where they stood with his cane, "don't you know that the whole of this part of Provins is built on catacombs?"

"Catacombs?"

"Yes, catacombs, the extent and height of which are yet undiscovered.

They are like the naves of cathedrals, and there are pillars in them."

"Monsieur is writing a great archaeological work to explain these strange constructions," interposed Monsieur Martener, seeing that the deputy-judge was about to mount his hobby.

Rogron came home much comforted to know that his house

was in the valley. The crypts of Provins kept him occupied for a week in explorations, and gave a topic of conversation to the unhappy celibates for many evenings.

In the course of these ramblings Rogron picked up various bits of information about Provins, its inhabitants, their marriages, together with stale political news; all of which he narrated to his sister. Scores of times in his walks he would stop and say, – often to the same person on the same day, – "Well, what's the news?" When he reached home he would fling himself on the sofa like a man exhausted with labor, whereas he was only worn out with the burden of his own dullness. Dinner came at last, after he had gone twenty times to the kitchen and back, compared the clocks, and opened and shut all the doors of the house. So long as the brother and sister could spend their evenings in paying visits they managed to get along till bedtime; but after they were compelled to stay at home those evenings became like a parching desert. Sometimes persons passing through the quiet little square would hear unearthly noises as though the brother were throttling the sister; a moment's listening would show that they were only yawning. These two human mechanisms, having nothing to grind between their rusty wheels, were creaking and grating at each other. The brother talked of marrying, but only in despair. He felt old and weary; the thought of a woman frightened him. Sylvie, who began to see the necessity of having a third person in the home, suddenly remembered the little cousin, about whom no one in Provins had yet inquired, the friends of Madame Lorrain

probably supposing that mother and child were both dead.

Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she was too thoroughly an old maid even to mislay the smallest article; but she pretended to have suddenly found the Lorrains' letter, so as to mention Pierrette naturally to her brother, who was greatly pleased at the possibility of having a little girl in the house. Sylvie replied to Madame Lorrain's letter half affectionately, half commercially, as one may say, explaining the delay by their change of abode and the settlement of their affairs. She seemed desirous of receiving her little cousin, and hinted that Pierrette would perhaps inherit twelve thousand francs a year if her brother Jerome did not marry.

Perhaps it is necessary to have been, like Nebuchadnezzar, something of a wild beast, and shut up in a cage at the Jardin des Plantes without other prey than the butcher's meat doled out by the keeper, or a retired merchant deprived of the joys of tormenting his clerks, to understand the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited the arrival of their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the letter had gone, the pair were already asking themselves when she would get there.

Sylvie perceived in her spurious benevolence towards her poor cousin a means of recovering her position in the social world of Provins. She accordingly went to call on Madame Tiphaine, of whose reprobation she was conscious, in order to impart the fact of Pierrette's approaching arrival, – deploring the girl's unfortunate position, and posing herself as being only too happy

to succor her and give her a position as daughter and future heiress.

"You have been rather long in discovering her," said Madame Tiphaine, with a touch of sarcasm.

A few words said in a low voice by Madame Garceland, while the cards were being dealt, recalled to the minds of those who heard her the shameful conduct of old Rogron about the Auffray property; the notary explained the iniquity.

"Where is the little girl now?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine, politely.

"In Brittany," said Rogron.

"Brittany is a large place," remarked Monsieur Lesourd.

"Her grandfather and grandmother Lorrain wrote to us – when was that, my dear?" said Rogron addressing his sister.

Sylvie, who was just then asking Madame Garceland where she had bought the stuff for her gown, answered hastily, without thinking of the effect of her words: —

"Before we sold the business."

"And have you only just answered the letter, mademoiselle?" asked the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as a live coal.

"We wrote to the Institution of Saint-Jacques," remarked Rogron.

"That is a sort of hospital or almshouse for old people," said Monsieur Desfondrilles, who knew Nantes. "She can't be there; they receive no one under sixty."

"She is there, with her grandmother Lorrain," said Rogron.

"Her mother had a little fortune, the eight thousand francs which your father – no, I mean of course your grandfather – left to her," said the notary, making the blunder intentionally.

"Ah!" said Rogron, stupidly, not understanding the notary's sarcasm.

"Then you know nothing about your cousin's position or means?" asked Monsieur Tiphaine.

"If Monsieur Rogron had known it," said the deputy-judge, "he would never have left her all this time in an establishment of that kind. I remember now that a house in Nantes belonging to Monsieur and Madame Lorrain was sold under an order of the court, and that Mademoiselle Lorrain's claim was swallowed up. I know this, for I was commissioner at the time."

The notary spoke of Colonel Lorrain, who, had he lived, would have been much amazed to know that his daughter was in such an institution. The Rogrons beat a retreat, saying to each other that the world was very malicious. Sylvie perceived that the news of her benevolence had missed its effect, – in fact, she had lost ground in all minds; and she felt that henceforth she was forbidden to attempt an intimacy with the upper class of Provins. After this evening the Rogrons no longer concealed their hatred of that class and all its adherents. The brother told the sister the scandals that Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet had put into his head about the Tiphaines, the Guenees, the Garcelands, the Julliards, and others: —

"I declare, Sylvie, I don't see why Madame Tiphaine should turn up her nose at shopkeeping in the rue Saint-Denis; it is more honest than what she comes from. Madame Roguin, her mother, is cousin to those Guillaumes of the 'Cat-playing-ball' who gave up the business to Joseph Lebas, their son-in-law. Her father is that Roguin who failed in 1819, and ruined the house of Cesar Birotteau. Madame Tiphaine's fortune was stolen, – for what else are you to call it when a notary's wife who is very rich lets her husband make a fraudulent bankruptcy? Fine doings! and she marries her daughter in Provins to get her out of the way, – all on account of her own relations with du Tillet. And such people set up to be proud! Well, well, that's the world!"

On the day when Jerome Rogron and his sister began to declaim against "the clique" they were, without being aware of it, on the road to having a society of their own; their house was to become a rendezvous for other interests seeking a centre, – those of the hitherto floating elements of the liberal party in Provins. And this is how it came about: The launch of the Rogrons in society had been watched with great curiosity by Colonel Gouraud and the lawyer Vinet, two men drawn together, first by their ostracism, next by their opinions. They both professed patriotism and for the same reason, – they wished to become of consequence. The Liberals in Provins were, so far, confined to one old soldier who kept a cafe, an innkeeper, Monsieur Cournant a notary, Doctor Neraud, and a few stray persons, mostly farmers or those who had bought lands of the public

domain.

The colonel and the lawyer, delighted to lay hands on a fool whose money would be useful to their schemes, and who might himself, in certain cases, be made to bell the cat, while his house would serve as a meeting-ground for the scattered elements of the party, made the most of the Rogrons' ill-will against the upper classes of the place. The three had already a slight tie in their united subscription to the "Constitutionnel"; it would certainly not be difficult for the colonel to make a Liberal of the ex-mercier, though Rogron knew so little of politics that he was capable of regarding the exploits of Sergeant Mercier as those of a brother shopkeeper.

The expected arrival of Pierrette brought to sudden fruition the selfish ideas of the two men, inspired as they were by the folly and ignorance of the celibates. Seeing that Sylvie had lost all chance of establishing herself in the good society of the place, an afterthought came to the colonel. Old soldiers have seen so many horrors in all lands, so many grinning corpses on battle-fields, that no physiognomies repel them; and Gouraud began to cast his eyes on the old maid's fortune. This imperial colonel, a short, fat man, wore enormous rings in ears that were bushy with tufts of hair. His sparse and grizzled whiskers were called in 1799 "fins." His jolly red face was rather discolored, like those of all who had lived to tell of the Beresina. The lower half of his big, pointed stomach marked the straight line which characterizes a cavalry officer. Gouraud had commanded the Second Hussars.

His gray moustache hid a huge blustering mouth, – if we may use a term which alone describes that gulf. He did not eat his food, he engulfed it. A sabre cut had slit his nose, by which his speech was made thick and very nasal, like that attributed to Capuchins. His hands, which were short and broad, were of the kind that make women say: "You have the hands of a rascal." His legs seemed slender for his torso. In that fat and active body an absolutely lawless spirit disported itself, and a thorough experience of the things of life, together with a profound contempt for social convention, lay hidden beneath the apparent indifference of a soldier. Colonel Gouraud wore the cross of an officer of the Legion of honor, and his emoluments from that, together with his salary as a retired officer, gave him in all about three thousand francs a year.

The lawyer, tall and thin, had liberal opinions in place of talent, and his only revenue was the meagre profits of his office. In Provins lawyers plead their own cases. The court was unfavorable to Vinet on account of his opinions; consequently, even the farmers who were Liberals, when it came to lawsuits preferred to employ some lawyer who was more congenial to the judges. Vinet was regarded with disfavor in other ways. He was said to have seduced a rich girl in the neighborhood of Coulommiers, and thus have forced her parents to marry her to him. Madame Vinet was a Chargeboeuf, an old and noble family of La Brie, whose name comes from the exploit of a squire during the expedition of Saint Louis to Egypt. She incurred the

displeasure of her father and mother, who arranged, unknown to Vinet, to leave their entire fortune to their son, doubtless charging him privately, to pay over a portion of it to his sister's children.

Thus the first bold effort of the ambitious man was a failure. Pursued by poverty, and ashamed not to give his wife the means of making a suitable appearance, he had made desperate efforts to enter public life, but the Chargeboeuf family refused him their influence. These Royalists disapproved, on moral grounds, of his forced marriage; besides, he was named Vinet, and how could they be expected to protect a plebian? Thus he was driven from branch to branch when he tried to get some good out of his marriage. Repulsed by every one, filled with hatred for the family of his wife, for the government which denied him a place, for the social world of Provins, which refused to admit him, Vinet submitted to his fate; but his gall increased. He became a Liberal in the belief that his fortune might yet be made by the triumph of the opposition, and he lived in a miserable little house in the Upper town from which his wife seldom issued. Madame Vinet had found no one to defend her since her marriage except an old Madame de Chargeboeuf, a widow with one daughter, who lived at Troyes. The unfortunate young woman, destined for better things, was absolutely alone in her home with a single child.

There are some kinds of poverty which may be nobly accepted and gaily borne; but Vinet, devoured by ambition, and feeling himself guilty towards his wife, was full of darkling rage; his conscience grew elastic; and he finally came to think any means

of success permissible. His young face changed. Persons about the courts were sometimes frightened as they looked at his viperish, flat head, his slit mouth, his eyes gleaming through glasses, and heard his sharp, persistent voice which rasped their nerves. His muddy skin, with its sickly tones of green and yellow, expressed the jaundice of his balked ambition, his perpetual disappointments and his hidden wretchedness. He could talk and argue; he was well-informed and shrewd, and was not without smartness and metaphor. Accustomed to look at everything from the standpoint of his own success, he was well fitted for a politician. A man who shrinks from nothing so long as it is legal, is strong; and Vinet's strength lay there.

This future athlete of parliamentary debate, who was destined to share in proclaiming the dynasty of the house of Orleans had a terrible influence on Pierrette's fate. At the present moment he was bent on making for himself a weapon by founding a newspaper at Provins. After studying the Rogrons at a distance (the colonel aiding him) he had come to the conclusion that the brother might be made useful. This time he was not mistaken; his days of poverty were over, after seven wretched years, when even his daily bread was sometimes lacking. The day when Gouraud told him in the little square that the Rogrons had finally quarrelled with the bourgeois aristocracy of the Upper town, he nudged the colonel in the ribs significantly, and said, with a knowing look: —

"One woman or another — handsome or ugly — *you* don't care;

marry Mademoiselle Rogron and we can organize something at once."

"I have been thinking of it," replied Gouraud, "but the fact is they have sent for the daughter of Colonel Lorrain, and she's their next of kin."

"You can get them to make a will in your favor. Ha! you would get a very comfortable house."

"As for the little girl – well, well, let's see her," said the colonel, with a leering and thoroughly wicked look, which proved to a man of Vinet's quality how little respect the old trooper could feel for any girl.

IV

PIERRETTE

After her grandfather and grandmother entered the sort of hospital in which they sadly expected to end their days, Pierrette, being young and proud, suffered so terribly at living there on charity that she was thankful when she heard she had rich relations. When Brigaut, the son of her mother's friend the major, and the companion of her childhood, who was learning his trade as a cabinet-maker at Nantes, heard of her departure he offered her the money to pay her way to Paris in the diligence, – sixty francs, the total of his *pour-boires* as an apprentice, slowly amassed, and accepted by Pierrette with the sublime indifference of true affection, showing that in a like case she herself would be affronted by thanks.

Brigaut was in the habit of going every Sunday to Saint-Jacques to play with Pierrette and try to console her. The vigorous young workman knew the dear delight of bestowing a complete and devoted protection on an object involuntarily chosen by his heart. More than once he and Pierrette, sitting on Sundays in a corner of the garden, had embroidered the veil of the future with their youthful projects; the apprentice, armed with his plane, scoured the world to make their fortune, while Pierrette waited.

In October, 1824, when the child had completed her eleventh

year, she was entrusted by the two old people and by Brigaut, all three sorrowfully sad, to the conductor of the diligence from Nantes to Paris, with an entreaty to put her safely on the diligence from Paris to Provins and to take good care of her. Poor Brigaut! he ran like a dog after the coach looking at his dear Pierrette as long as he was able. In spite of her signs he ran over three miles, and when at last he was exhausted his eyes, wet with tears, still followed her. She, too, was crying when she saw him no longer running by her, and putting her head out of the window she watched him, standing stock-still and looking after her, as the lumbering vehicle disappeared.

The Lorrains and Brigaut knew so little of life that the girl had not a penny when she arrived in Paris. The conductor, to whom she had mentioned her rich friends, paid her expenses at the hotel, and made the conductor of the Provins diligence pay him, telling him to take good care of the girl and to see that the charges were paid by the family, exactly as though she were a case of goods. Four days after her departure from Nantes, about nine o'clock of a Monday night, a kind old conductor of the Messageries-royales, took Pierrette by the hand, and while the porters were discharging in the Grand'Rue the packages and passengers for Provins, he led the little girl, whose only baggage was a bundle containing two dresses, two chemises, and two pairs of stockings, to Mademoiselle Rogron's house, which was pointed out to him by the director at the coach office.

"Good-evening, mademoiselle and the rest of the company.

I've brought you a cousin, and here she is; and a nice little girl too, upon my word. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, and sign my book."

Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother were dumb with pleasure and amazement.

"Excuse me," said the conductor, "the coach is waiting. Sign my book and pay me forty-seven francs, sixty centimes, and whatever you please for myself and the conductor from Nantes; we've taken care of the little girl as if she were our own; and paid for her beds and her food, also her fare to Provins, and other little things."

"Forty-seven francs, twelve sous!" said Sylvie.

"You are not going to dispute it?" cried the man.

"Where's the bill?" said Rogron.

"Bill! look at the book."

"Stop talking, and pay him," said Sylvie, "You see there's nothing else to be done."

Rogron went to get the money, and gave the man forty-seven francs, twelve sous.

"And nothing for my comrade and me?" said the conductor.

Sylvie took two francs from the depths of the old velvet bag which held her keys.

"Thank you, no," said the man; "keep 'em yourself. We would rather care for the little one for her own sake." He picked up his book and departed, saying to the servant-girl: "What a pair! it seems there are crocodiles out of Egypt!"

"Such men are always brutal," said Sylvie, who overheard the words.

"They took good care of the little girl, anyhow," said Adele with her hands on her hips.

"We don't have to live with him," remarked Rogron.

"Where's the little one to sleep?" asked Adele.

Such was the arrival of Pierrette Lorrain in the home of her cousins, who gazed at her with stolid eyes; she was tossed to them like a package, with no intermediate state between the wretched chamber at Saint-Jacques and the dining-room of her cousins, which seemed to her a palace. She was shy and speechless. To all other eyes than those of the Rogrons the little Breton girl would have seemed enchanting as she stood there in her petticoat of coarse blue flannel, with a pink cambric apron, thick shoes, blue stockings, and a white kerchief, her hands being covered by red worsted mittens edged with white, bought for her by the conductor. Her dainty Breton cap (which had been washed in Paris, for the journey from Nantes had rumpled it) was like a halo round her happy little face. This national cap, of the finest lawn, trimmed with stiffened lace pleated in flat folds, deserves description, it was so dainty and simple. The light coming through the texture and the lace produced a partial shadow, the soft shadow of a light upon the skin, which gave her the virginal grace that all painters seek and Leopold Robert found for the Raffaelesque face of the woman who holds a child in his picture of "The Gleaners." Beneath this fluted frame of

light sparkled a white and rosy and artless face, glowing with vigorous health. The warmth of the room brought the blood to the cheeks, to the tips of the pretty ears, to the lips and the end of the delicate nose, making the natural white of the complexion whiter still.

"Well, are you not going to say anything? I am your cousin Sylvie, and that is your cousin Rogron."

"Do you want something to eat?" asked Rogron.

"When did you leave Nantes?" asked Sylvie.

"Is she dumb?" said Rogron.

"Poor little dear, she has hardly any clothes," cried Adele, who had opened the child's bundle, tied up in a handkerchief of the old Lorrains.

"Kiss your cousin," said Sylvie.

Pierrette kissed Rogron.

"Kiss your cousin," said Rogron.

Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

"She is tired out with her journey, poor little thing; she wants to go to sleep," said Adele.

Pierrette was overcome with a sudden and invincible aversion for her two relatives, – a feeling that no one had ever before excited in her. Sylvie and the maid took her up to bed in the room where Brigaut afterwards noticed the white cotton curtain. In it was a little bed with a pole painted blue, from which hung a calico curtain; a walnut bureau without a marble top, a small table, a looking-glass, a very common night-table without a door,

and three chairs completed the furniture of the room. The walls, which sloped in front, were hung with a shabby paper, blue with black flowers. The tiled floor, stained red and polished, was icy to the feet. There was no carpet except for a strip at the bedside. The mantelpiece of common marble was adorned by a mirror, two candelabra in copper-gilt, and a vulgar alabaster cup in which two pigeons, forming handles, were drinking.

"You will be comfortable here, my little girl?" said Sylvie.

"Oh, it's beautiful!" said the child, in her silvery voice.

"She's not difficult to please," muttered the stout servant.

"Sha'n't I warm her bed?" she asked.

"Yes," said Sylvie, "the sheets may be damp."

Adele brought one of her own night-caps when she returned with the warming-pan, and Pierrette, who had never slept in anything but the coarsest linen sheets, was amazed at the fineness and softness of the cotton ones. When she was fairly in bed and tucked up, Adele, going downstairs with Sylvie, could not refrain from saying, "All she has isn't worth three francs, mademoiselle."

Ever since her economical regime began, Sylvie had compelled the maid to sit in the dining-room so that one fire and one lamp could do for all; except when Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, on which occasions Adele was sent to the kitchen.

Pierrette's arrival enlivened the rest of the evening.

"We must get her some clothes to-morrow," said Sylvie; "she has absolutely nothing."

"No shoes but those she had on, which weigh a pound," said

Adele.

"That's always so, in their part of the country," remarked Rogron.

"How she looked at her room! though it really isn't handsome enough for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle."

"It is good enough; hold your tongue," said Sylvie.

"Gracious, what chemises! coarse enough to scratch her skin off; not a thing can she use here," said Adele, emptying the bundle.

Master, mistress, and servant were busy till past ten o'clock, deciding what cambric they should buy for the new chemises, how many pairs of stockings, how many under-petticoats, and what material, and in reckoning up the whole cost of Pierrette's outfit.

"You won't get off under three hundred francs," said Rogron, who could remember the different prices, and add them up from his former shop-keeping habit.

"Three hundred francs!" cried Sylvie.

"Yes, three hundred. Add it up."

The brother and sister went over the calculation once more, and found the cost would be fully three hundred francs, not counting the making.

"Three hundred francs at one stroke!" said Sylvie to herself as she got into bed.

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love endows with its tenderness, its vivacity, its gaiety, its nobility, its devotion. Nothing had so far disturbed or wounded a heart that was delicate as that of a fawn, but which was now painfully repressed by the cold greeting of her cousins. If Brittany had been full of outward misery, at least it was full of love. The old Lorrains were the most incapable of merchants, but they were also the most loving, frank, caressing, of friends, like all who are incautious and free from calculation. Their little granddaughter had received no other education at Pen-Hoel than that of nature. Pierrette went where she liked, in a boat on the pond, or roaming the village and the fields with Jacques Brigaut, her comrade, exactly as Paul and Virginia might have done. Petted by everybody, free as air, they gaily chased the joys of childhood. In summer they ran to watch the fishing, they caught the many-colored insects, they gathered flowers, they gardened; in winter they made slides, they built snow-men or huts, or pelted each other with snowballs. Welcomed by all, they met with smiles wherever they went.

When the time came to begin their education, disasters came, too. Jacques, left without means at the death of his father, was apprenticed by his relatives to a cabinet-maker, and fed by charity, as Pierrette was soon to be at Saint-Jacques. Until the

little girl was taken with her grandparents to that asylum, she had known nothing but fond caresses and protection from every one. Accustomed to confide in so much love, the little darling missed in these rich relatives, so eagerly desired, the kindly looks and ways which all the world, even strangers and the conductors of the coaches, had bestowed upon her. Her bewilderment, already great, was increased by the moral atmosphere she had entered. The heart turns suddenly cold or hot like the body. The poor child wanted to cry, without knowing why; but being very tired she went to sleep.

The next morning, Pierrette being, like all country children, accustomed to get up early, was awake two hours before the cook. She dressed herself, stepping on tiptoe about her room, looked out at the little square, started to go downstairs and was struck with amazement by the beauties of the staircase. She stopped to examine all its details: the painted walls, the brasses, the various ornamentations, the window fixtures. Then she went down to the garden-door, but was unable to open it, and returned to her room to wait until Adele should be stirring. As soon as the woman went to the kitchen Pierrette flew to the garden and took possession of it, ran to the river, was amazed at the kiosk, and sat down in it; truly, she had enough to see and to wonder at until her cousins were up. At breakfast Sylvie said to her: —

"Was it you, little one, who was trotting over my head by daybreak, and making that racket on the stairs? You woke me so that I couldn't go to sleep again. You must be very good and

quiet, and amuse yourself without noise. Your cousin doesn't like noise."

"And you must wipe your feet," said Rogron. "You went into the kiosk with your dirty shoes, and they've tracked all over the floor. Your cousin likes cleanliness. A great girl like you ought to be clean. Weren't you clean in Brittany? But I recollect when I went down there to buy thread it was pitiable to see the folks, – they were like savages. At any rate she has a good appetite," added Rogron, looking at his sister; "one would think she hadn't eaten anything for days."

Thus, from the very start Pierrette was hurt by the remarks of her two cousins, – hurt, she knew not why. Her straightforward, open nature, hitherto left to itself, was not given to reflection. Incapable of thinking that her cousins were hard, she was fated to find it out slowly through suffering. After breakfast the brother and sister, pleased with Pierrette's astonishment at the house and anxious to enjoy it, took her to the salon to show her its splendors and teach her not to touch them. Many celibates, driven by loneliness and the moral necessity of caring for something, substitute factitious affections for natural ones; they love dogs, cats, canaries, servants, or their confessor. Rogron and Sylvie had come to the pass of loving immoderately their house and furniture, which had cost them so dear. Sylvie began by helping Adele in the mornings to dust and arrange the furniture, under pretence that she did not know how to keep it looking as good as new. This dusting was soon a desired occupation to her, and

the furniture, instead of losing its value in her eyes, became ever more precious. To use things without hurting them or soiling them or scratching the woodwork or clouding the varnish, that was the problem which soon became the mania of the old maid's life. Sylvie had a closet full of bits of wool, wax, varnish, and brushes, which she had learned to use with the dexterity of a cabinet-maker; she had her feather dusters and her dusting-cloths; and she rubbed away without fear of hurting herself, — she was so strong. The glance of her cold blue eyes, hard as steel, was forever roving over the furniture and under it, and you could as soon have found a tender spot in her heart as a bit of fluff under the sofa.

After the remarks made at Madame Tiphaine's, Sylvie dared not flinch from the three hundred francs for Pierrette's clothes. During the first week her time was wholly taken up, and Pierrette's too, by frocks to order and try on, chemises and petticoats to cut out and have made by a seamstress who went out by the day. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"That's pretty bringing up!" said Rogron. "Don't you know how to do anything, little girl?"

Pierrette, who knew nothing but how to love, made a pretty, childish gesture.

"What did you do in Brittany?" asked Rogron.

"I played," she answered, naively. "Everybody played with me. Grandmamma and grandpapa they told me stories. Ah! they all loved me!"

"Hey!" said Rogron; "didn't you take it easy!"

Pierrette opened her eyes wide, not comprehending.

"She is as stupid as an owl," said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best seamstress in Provins.

"She's so young," said the workwoman, looking kindly at Pierrette, whose delicate little muzzle was turned up to her with a coaxing look.

Pierrette preferred the sewing-women to her relations. She was endearing in her ways with them, she watched their work, and made them those pretty speeches that seem like the flowers of childhood, and which her cousin had already silenced, for that gaunt woman loved to impress those under her with salutary awe. The sewing-women were delighted with Pierrette. Their work, however, was not carried on without many and loud grumblings.

"That child will make us pay through the nose!" cried Sylvie to her brother.

"Stand still, my dear, and don't plague us; it is all for you and not for me," she would say to Pierrette when the child was being measured. Sometimes it was, when Pierrette would ask the seamstress some question, "Let Mademoiselle Borain do her work, and don't talk to her; it is not you who are paying for her time."

"Mademoiselle," said Mademoiselle Borain, "am I to back-stitch this?"

"Yes, do it firmly; I don't want to be making such an outfit as this every day."

Sylvie put the same spirit of emulation into Pierrette's outfit that she had formerly put into the house. She was determined that her cousin should be as well dressed as Madame Garceland's little girl. She bought the child fashionable boots of bronzed kid like those the little Tiphaines wore, very fine cotton stockings, a corset by the best maker, a dress of blue reps, a pretty cape lined with white silk, – all this that she, Sylvie, might hold her own against the children of the women who had rejected her. The underclothes were quite in keeping with the visible articles of dress, for Sylvie feared the examining eyes of the various mothers. Pierrette's chemises were of fine Madapolam calico. Mademoiselle Borain had mentioned that the sub-prefect's little girls wore cambric drawers, embroidered and trimmed in the latest style. Pierrette had the same. Sylvie ordered for her a charming little drawn bonnet of blue velvet lined with white satin, precisely like the one worn by Dr. Martener's little daughter.

Thus attired, Pierrette was the most enchanting little girl in all Provins. On Sunday, after church, all the ladies kissed her; Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Julliard, and the rest fell in love with the sweet little Breton girl. This enthusiasm was deeply flattering to old Sylvie's self-love; she regarded it as less due to Pierrette than to her own benevolence. She ended, however, in being affronted by her cousin's success. Pierrette was constantly invited out, and Sylvie allowed her to go, always for the purpose of triumphing over "those ladies." Pierrette was

much in demand for games or little parties and dinners with their own little girls. She had succeeded where the Rogrons had failed; and Mademoiselle Sylvie soon grew indignant that Pierrette was asked to other children's houses when those children never came to hers. The artless little thing did not conceal the pleasure she found in her visits to these ladies, whose affectionate manners contrasted strangely with the harshness of her two cousins. A mother would have rejoiced in the happiness of her little one, but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette for their own sakes, not for hers; their feelings, far from being parental, were dyed in selfishness and a sort of commercial calculation.

The handsome outfit, the fine Sunday dresses, and the everyday frocks were the beginning of Pierrette's troubles. Like all children free to amuse themselves, who are accustomed to follow the dictates of their own lively fancies, she was very hard on her clothes, her shoes, and above all on those embroidered drawers. A mother when she reproves her child thinks only of the child; her voice is gentle; she does not raise it unless driven to extremities, or when the child is much in fault. But here, in this great matter of Pierrette's clothes, the cousins' money was the first consideration; their interests were to be thought of, not the child's. Children have the perceptions of the canine race for the sentiments of those who rule them; they know instinctively whether they are loved or only tolerated. Pure and innocent hearts are more distressed by shades of difference than by contrasts; a child does not understand evil, but it knows

when the instinct of the good and the beautiful which nature has implanted in it is shocked. The lectures which Pierrette now drew upon herself on propriety of behavior, modesty, and economy were merely the corollary of the one theme, "Pierrette will ruin us."

These perpetual fault-findings, which were destined to have a fatal result for the poor child, brought the two celibates back to the old beaten track of their shop-keeping habits, from which their removal to Provins had parted them, and in which their natures were now to expand and flourish. Accustomed in the old days to rule and to make inquisitions, to order about and reprove their clerks sharply, Rogron and his sister had actually suffered for want of victims. Little minds need to practise despotism to relieve their nerves, just as great souls thirst for equality in friendship to exercise their hearts. Narrow natures expand by persecuting as much as others through beneficence; they prove their power over their fellows by cruel tyranny as others do by loving kindness; they simply go the way their temperaments drive them. Add to this the propulsion of self-interest and you may read the enigma of most social matters.

Thenceforth Pierrette became a necessity to the lives of her cousins. From the day of her coming their minds were occupied, – first, with her outfit, and then with the novelty of a third presence. But every new thing, a sentiment and even a tyranny, is moulded as time goes on into fresh shapes. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette "my dear," or "little one."

Then she abandoned the gentler terms for "Pierrette" only. Her reprimands, at first only cross, became sharp and angry; and no sooner were their feet on the path of fault-finding than the brother and sister made rapid strides. They were no longer bored to death! It was not their deliberate intention to be wicked and cruel; it was simply the blind instinct of an imbecile tyranny. The pair believed they were doing Pierrette a service, just as they had thought their harshness a benefit to their apprentices.

Pierrette, whose true and noble and extreme sensibility was the antipodes of the Rogrons' hardness, had a dread of being scolded; it wounded her so sharply that the tears would instantly start in her beautiful, pure eyes. She had a great struggle with herself before she could repress the enchanting sprightliness which made her so great a favorite elsewhere. After a time she displayed it only in the homes of her little friends. By the end of the first month she had learned to be passive in her cousins' house, — so much so that Rogron one day asked her if she was ill. At that sudden question, she ran to the end of the garden, and stood crying beside the river, into which her tears may have fallen as she herself was about to fall into the social torrent.

One day, in spite of all her care, she tore her best reps frock at Madame Tiphaine's, where she was spending a happy day. The poor child burst into tears, foreseeing the cruel things which would be said to her at home. Questioned by her friends, she let fall a few words about her terrible cousin. Madame Tiphaine happened to have some reps exactly like that of the frock, and

she put in a new breadth herself. Mademoiselle Rogron found out the trick, as she expressed it, which the little devil had played her. From that day forth she refused to let Pierrette go to any of "those women's" houses.

The life the poor girl led in Provins was divided into three distinct phases. The first, already shown, in which she had some joy mingled with the cold kindness of her cousins and their sharp reproaches, lasted three months. Sylvie's refusal to let her go to her little friends, backed by the necessity of beginning her education, ended the first phase of her life at Provins, the only period when that life was bearable to her.

These events, produced at the Rogrons by Pierrette's presence, were studied by Vinet and the colonel with the caution of foxes preparing to enter a poultry-yard and disturbed by seeing a strange fowl. They both called from time to time, – but seldom, so as not to alarm the old maid; they talked with Rogron under various pretexts, and made themselves masters of his mind with an affectation of reserve and modesty which the great Tartuffe himself would have respected. The colonel and the lawyer were spending the evening with Rogron on the very day when Sylvie had refused in bitter language to let Pierrette go again to Madame Tiphaine's, or elsewhere. Being told of this refusal the colonel and the lawyer looked at each other with an air which seemed to say that they at least knew Provins well.

"Madame Tiphaine intended to insult you," said the lawyer. "We have long been warning Rogron of what would happen.

There's no good to be got from those people."

"What can you expect from the anti-national party!" cried the colonel, twirling his moustache and interrupting the lawyer. "But, mademoiselle, if we had tried to warn you from those people you might have supposed we had some malicious motive in what we said. If you like a game of cards in the evening, why don't you have it at home; why not play your boston here, in your own house? Is it impossible to fill the places of those idiots, the Julliards and all the rest of them? Vinet and I know how to play boston, and we can easily find a fourth. Vinet might present his wife to you; she is charming, and, what is more, a Chargeboeuf. You will not be so exacting as those apes of the Upper town; *you* won't require a good little housewife, who is compelled by the meanness of her family to do her own work, to dress like a duchess. Poor woman, she has the courage of a lion and the meekness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron showed her long yellow teeth as she smiled on the colonel, who bore the sight heroically and assumed a flattered air.

"If we are only four we can't play boston every night," said Sylvie.

"Why not? What do you suppose an old soldier of the Empire like me does with himself? And as for Vinet, his evenings are always free. Besides, you'll have plenty of other visitors; I warrant you that," he added, with a rather mysterious air.

"What you ought to do," said Vinet, "is to take an open stand

against the ministerialists of Provins and form an opposition to them. You would soon see how popular that would make you; you would have a society about you at once. The Tiphaines would be furious at an opposition salon. Well, well, why not laugh at others, if others laugh at you? – and they do; the clique doesn't mince matters in talking about you."

"How's that?" demanded Sylvie.

In the provinces there is always a valve or a faucet through which gossip leaks from one social set to another. Vinet knew all the slurs cast upon the Rogrons in the salons from which they were now excluded. The deputy-judge and archaeologist Desfondrilles belonged to neither party. With other independents like him, he repeated what he heard on both sides and Vinet made the most of it. The lawyer's spiteful tongue put venom into Madame Tiphaine's speeches, and by showing Rogron and Sylvie the ridicule they had brought upon themselves he roused an undying spirit of hatred in those bitter natures, which needed an object for their petty passions.

A few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred woman, neither pretty nor plain, timid, very gentle, and deeply conscious of her false position. Madame Vinet was fair-complexioned, faded by the cares of her poor household, and very simply dressed. No woman could have pleased Sylvie more. Madame Vinet endured her airs, and bent before them like one accustomed to subjection. On the poor woman's rounded brow and delicately timid cheek and in her slow and gentle glance, were

the traces of deep reflection, of those perceptive thoughts which women who are accustomed to suffer bury in total silence.

The influence of the colonel (who now displayed to Sylvie the graces of a courtier, in marked contradiction to his usual military brusqueness), together with that of the astute Vinet, was soon to harm the Breton child. Shut up in the house, no longer allowed to go out except in company with her old cousin, Pierrette, that pretty little squirrel, was at the mercy of the incessant cry, "Don't touch that, child, let that alone!" She was perpetually being lectured on her carriage and behavior; if she stooped or rounded her shoulders her cousin would call to her to be as erect as herself (Sylvie was rigid as a soldier presenting arms to his colonel); sometimes indeed the ill-natured old maid enforced the order by slaps on the back to make the girl straighten up.

Thus the free and joyous little child of the Marais learned by degrees to repress all liveliness and to make herself, as best she could, an automaton.

V

HISTORY OF POOR COUSINS IN THE HOME OF RICH ONES

One evening, which marked the beginning of Pierrette's second phase of life in her cousin's house, the child, whom the three guests had not seen during the evening, came into the room to kiss her relatives and say good-night to the company. Sylvie turned her cheek coldly to the pretty creature, as if to avoid kissing her. The motion was so cruelly significant that the tears sprang to Pierrette's eyes.

"Did you prick yourself, little girl?" said the atrocious Vinet.

"What is the matter?" asked Sylvie, severely.

"Nothing," said the poor child, going up to Rogron.

"Nothing?" said Sylvie, "that's nonsense; nobody cries for nothing."

"What is it, my little darling?" said Madame Vinet.

"My rich cousin isn't as kind to me as my poor grandmother was," sobbed Pierrette.

"Your grandmother took your money," said Sylvie, "and your cousin will leave you hers."

The colonel and the lawyer glanced at each other.

"I would rather be robbed and loved," said Pierrette.

"Then you shall be sent back whence you came."

"But what has the dear little thing done?" asked Madame Vinet.

Vinet gave his wife the terrible, fixed, cold look with which men enforce their absolute dominion. The hapless helot, punished incessantly for not having the one thing that was wanted of her, a fortune, took up her cards.

"What has she done?" said Sylvie, throwing up her head with such violence that the yellow wall-flowers in her cap nodded. "She is always looking about to annoy us. She opened my watch to see the inside, and meddled with the wheel and broke the mainspring. Mademoiselle pays no heed to what is said to her. I am all day long telling her to take care of things, and I might just as well talk to that lamp."

Pierrette, ashamed at being reproved before strangers, crept softly out of the room.

"I am thinking all the time how to subdue that child," said Rogron.

"Isn't she old enough to go to school?" asked Madame Vinet. Again she was silenced by a look from her husband, who had been careful to tell her nothing of his own or the colonel's schemes.

"This is what comes of taking charge of other people's children!" cried the colonel. "You may still have some of your own, you or your brother. Why don't you both marry?"

Sylvie smiled agreeably on the colonel. For the first time in her life she met a man to whom the idea that she could marry

did not seem absurd.

"Madame Vinet is right," cried Rogron; "perhaps teaching would keep Pierrette quiet. A master wouldn't cost much."

The colonel's remark so preoccupied Sylvie that she made no answer to her brother.

"If you are willing to be security for that opposition journal I was talking to you about," said Vinet, "you will find an excellent master for the little cousin in the managing editor; we intend to engage that poor schoolmaster who lost his employment through the encroachments of the clergy. My wife is right; Pierrette is a rough diamond that wants polishing."

"I thought you were a baron," said Sylvie to the colonel, while the cards were being dealt, and after a long pause in which they had all been rather thoughtful.

"Yes; but when I was made baron, in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, where my regiment performed miracles, I had money and influence enough to secure the rank. But now my barony is like the grade of general which I held in 1815, – it needs a revolution to give it back to me."

"If you will secure my endorsement by a mortgage," said Rogron, answering Vinet after long consideration, "I will give it."

"That can easily be arranged," said Vinet. "The new paper will soon restore the colonel's rights, and make your salon more powerful in Provins than those of Tiphaine and company."

"How so?" asked Sylvie.

While his wife was dealing and Vinet himself explaining

the importance they would all gain by the publication of an independent newspaper, Pierrette was dissolved in tears; her heart and her mind were one in this matter; she felt and knew that her cousin was more to blame than she was. The little country girl instinctively understood that charity and benevolence ought to be a complete offering. She hated her handsome frocks and all the things that were made for her; she was forced to pay too dearly for such benefits. She wept with vexation at having given cause for complaint against her, and resolved to behave in future in such a way as to compel her cousins to find no further fault with her. The thought then came into her mind how grand Brigaut had been in giving her all his savings without a word. Poor child! she fancied her troubles were now at their worst; she little knew that other misfortunes were even now being planned for her in the salon.

A few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was taught to read, write, and cipher. Enormous injury was thus supposed to be done to the Rogrons' house. Ink-spots were found on the tables, on the furniture, on Pierrette's clothes; copy-books and pens were left about; sand was scattered everywhere, books were torn and dog's-eared as the result of these lessons. She was told in harsh terms that she would have to earn her own living, and not be a burden to others. As she listened to these cruel remarks Pierrette's throat contracted violently with acute pain, her heart throbbed. She was forced to restrain her tears, or she was scolded for weeping and told it was an insult to the

kindness of her magnanimous cousins. Rogron had found the life that suited him. He scolded Pierrette as he used to scold his clerks; he would call her when at play, and compel her to study; he made her repeat her lessons, and became himself the almost savage master of the poor child. Sylvie, on her side, considered it a duty to teach Pierrette the little that she knew herself about women's work. Neither Rogron nor his sister had the slightest softness in their natures. Their narrow minds, which found real pleasure in worrying the poor child, passed insensibly from outward kindness to extreme severity. This severity was necessitated, they believed, by what they called the self-will of the child, which had not been broken when young and was very obstinate. Her masters were ignorant how to give to their instructions a form suited to the intelligence of the pupil, – a thing, by the bye, which marks the difference between public and private education. The fault was far less with Pierrette than with her cousins. It took her an infinite length of time to learn the rudiments. She was called stupid and dull, clumsy and awkward for mere nothings. Incessantly abused in words, the child suffered still more from the harsh looks of her cousins. She acquired the doltish ways of a sheep; she dared not do anything of her own impulse, for all she did was misinterpreted, misjudged, and ill-received. In all things she awaited silently the good pleasure and the orders of her cousins, keeping her thoughts within her own mind and sheltering herself behind a passive obedience. Her brilliant colors began to fade. Sometimes she complained

of feeling ill. When her cousin asked, "Where?" the poor little thing, who had pains all over her, answered, "Everywhere."

"Nonsense! who ever heard of any one suffering everywhere?" cried Sylvie. "If you suffered everywhere you'd be dead."

"People suffer in their chests," said Rogron, who liked to hear himself harangue, "or they have toothache, headache, pains in their feet or stomach, but no one has pains everywhere. What do you mean by everywhere? I can tell you; 'everywhere' means *nowhere*. Don't you know what you are doing? – you are complaining for complaining's sake."

Pierrette ended by total silence, seeing how all her girlish remarks, the flowers of her dawning intelligence, were replied to with ignorant commonplaces which her natural good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You complain," said Rogron, "but you've got the appetite of a monk."

The only person who did not bruise the delicate little flower was the fat servant woman, Adele. Adele would go up and warm her bed, – doing it on the sly after a certain evening when Sylvie had scolded her for giving that comfort to the child.

"Children should be hardened, to give them strong constitutions. Am I and my brother the worse for it?" said Sylvie. "You'll make Pierrette a *peakling*"; this was a word in the Rogron vocabulary which meant a puny and suffering little being.

The naturally endearing ways of the angelic child were treated as dissimulation. The fresh, pure blossoms of affection which

bloomed instinctively in that young soul were pitilessly crushed. Pierrette suffered many a cruel blow on the tender flesh of her heart. If she tried to soften those ferocious natures by innocent, coaxing wiles they accused her of doing it with an object. "Tell me at once what you want?" Rogron would say, brutally; "you are not coaxing me for nothing."

Neither brother nor sister believed in affection, and Pierrette's whole being was affection. Colonel Gouraud, anxious to please Mademoiselle Rogron, approved of all she did about Pierrette. Vinet also encouraged them in what they said against her. He attributed all her so-called misdeeds to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and declared that no power, no will, could ever conquer it. Rogron and his sister were so shrewdly flattered by the two manoeuvrers that the former agreed to go security for the "Courrier de Provins," and the latter invested five thousand francs in the enterprise.

On this, the colonel and lawyer took the field. They got a hundred shares, of five hundred francs each, taken among the farmers and others called independents, and also among those who had bought lands of the national domains, – whose fears they worked upon. They even extended their operations throughout the department and along its borders. Each shareholder of course subscribed to the paper. The judicial advertisements were divided between the "Bee-hive" and the "Courrier." The first issue of the latter contained a pompous eulogy on Rogron. He was presented to the community as the Laffitte of Provins.

The public mind having thus received an impetus in this new direction, it was manifest, of course, that the coming elections would be contested. Madame Tiphaine, whose highest hope was to take her husband to Paris as deputy, was in despair. After reading an article in the new paper aimed at her and at Julliard junior, she remarked: "Unfortunately for me, I forgot that there is always a scoundrel close to a dupe, and that fools are magnets to clever men of the fox breed."

As soon as the "Courrier" was fairly launched on a radius of fifty miles, Vinet bought a new coat and decent boots, waistcoats, and trousers. He set up the gray slouch hat sacred to liberals, and showed his linen. His wife took a servant, and appeared in public dressed as the wife of a prominent man should be; her caps were pretty. Vinet proved grateful – out of policy. He and his friend Cournant, the liberal notary and the rival of the ministerial notary Auffray, became the close advisers of the Rogrons, to whom they were able to do a couple of signal services. The leases granted by old Rogron to their father in 1815, when matters were at a low ebb, were about to expire. Horticulture and vegetable gardening had developed enormously in the neighborhood of Provins. The lawyer and notary set to work to enable the Rogrons to increase their rentals. Vinet won two lawsuits against two districts on a question of planting trees, which involved five hundred poplars. The proceeds of the poplars, added to the savings of the brother and sister, who for the last three years had laid by six thousand a year at high interest, was wisely invested in the purchase

of improved lands. Vinet also undertook and carried out the ejectment of certain peasants to whom the elder Rogron had lent money on their farms, and who had strained every nerve to pay off the debt, but in vain. The cost of the Rogrons' fine house was thus in a measure recouped. Their landed property, lying around Provins and chosen by their father with the sagacious eye of an innkeeper, was divided into small holdings, the largest of which did not exceed five acres, and rented to safe tenants, men who owned other parcels of land, that were ample security for their leases. These investments brought in, by 1826, five thousand francs a year. Taxes were charged to the tenants, and there were no buildings needing insurance or repairs.

By the end of the second period of Pierrette's stay in Provins life had become so hard for her, the cold indifference of all who came to the house, the silly fault-finding, and the total absence of affection on the part of her cousins grew so bitter, she was conscious of a chill dampness like that of a grave creeping round her, that the bold idea of escaping, on foot and without money, to Brittany and to her grandparents took possession of her mind. Two events hindered her from attempting it. Old Lorrain died, and Rogron was appointed guardian of his little cousin. If the grandmother had died first, we may believe that Rogron, advised by Vinet, would have claimed Pierrette's eight thousand francs and reduced the old man to penury.

"You may, perhaps, inherit from Pierrette," said Vinet, with a horrid smile. "Who knows who may live and who may die?"

Enlightened by that remark, Rogron gave old Madame Lorrain no peace until she had secured to Pierrette the reversion of the eight thousand francs at her death.

Pierrette was deeply shocked by these events. She was on the point of making her first communion, – another reason for resigning the hope of escape from Provins. This ceremony, simple and customary as it was, led to great changes in the Rogron household. Sylvie learned that Monsieur le cure Peroux was instructing the little Julliards, Lesourds, Garcelands, and the rest. She therefore made it a point of honor that Pierrette should be instructed by the vicar himself, Monsieur Habert, a priest who was thought to belong to the *Congregation*, very zealous for the interests of the Church, and much feared in Provins, – a man who hid a vast ambition beneath the austerity of stern principles. The sister of this priest, an unmarried woman about thirty years of age, kept a school for young ladies. Brother and sister looked alike; both were thin, yellow, black-haired, and bilious.

Like a true Breton girl, cradled in the practices and poetry of Catholicism, Pierrette opened her heart and ears to the words of this imposing priest. Sufferings predispose the mind to devotion, and nearly all young girls, impelled by instinctive tenderness, are inclined to mysticism, the deepest aspect of religion. The priest found good soil in which to sow the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church. He completely changed the current of the girl's thoughts. Pierrette loved Jesus Christ in the light in which he is presented to young girls at the time of their first

communion, as a celestial bridegroom; her physical and moral sufferings gained a meaning for her; she saw the finger of God in all things. Her soul, so cruelly hurt although she could not accuse her cousins of actual wrong, took refuge in that sphere to which all sufferers fly on the wings of the cardinal virtues, – Faith, Hope, Charity. She abandoned her thoughts of escape. Sylvie, surprised by the transformation Monsieur Habert had effected in Pierrette, was curious to know how it had been done. And it thus came about that the austere priest, while preparing Pierrette for her first communion, also won to God the hitherto erring soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie became pious. Jerome Rogron, on whom the so-called Jesuit could get no grip (for just then the influence of His Majesty the late *Constitutionnel* the First was more powerful over weaklings than the influence of the Church), Jerome Rogron remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet, and Liberalism.

Mademoiselle Rogron naturally made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she sympathized deeply. The two spinsters loved each other as sisters. Mademoiselle Habert offered to take Pierrette into her school to spare Sylvie the annoyance of her education; but the brother and sister both declared that Pierrette's absence would make the house too lonely; their attachment to their little cousin seemed excessive.

When Gouraud and Vinet became aware of the advent of Mademoiselle Habert on the scene they concluded that the ambitious priest her brother had the same matrimonial plan for

his sister that the colonel was forming for himself and Sylvie.

"Your sister wants to get you married," said Vinet to Rogron.

"With whom?" asked Rogron.

"With that old sorceress of a schoolmistress," cried the colonel, twirling his moustache.

"She hasn't said anything to me about it," said Rogron, naively.

So thorough an old maid as Sylvie was certain to make good progress in the way of salvation. The influence of the priest would as certainly increase, and in the end affect Rogron, over whom Sylvie had great power. The two Liberals, who were naturally alarmed, saw plainly that if the priest were resolved to marry his sister to Rogron (a far more suitable marriage than that of Sylvie to the colonel) he could then drive Sylvie in extreme devotion to the Church, and put Pierrette in a convent. They might therefore lose eighteen months' labor in flattery and meannesses of all sorts. Their minds were suddenly filled with a bitter, silent hatred to the priest and his sister, though they felt the necessity of living on good terms with them in order to track their manoeuvres. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who could play both whist and boston, now came every evening to the Rogrons. The assiduity of the one pair induced the assiduity of the other. The colonel and lawyer felt that they were pitted against adversaries who were fully as strong as they, – a presentiment that was shared by the priest and his sister. The situation soon became that of a battle-field. Precisely as the colonel was enabling Sylvie to taste the unhopd-for joys of being sought in marriage, so

Mademoiselle Habert was enveloping the timid Rogron in the cotton-wool of her attentions, words, and glances. Neither side could utter that grand word of statesmanship, "Let us divide!" for each wanted the whole prey.

The two clever foxes of the Opposition made the mistake of pulling the first trigger. Vinet, under the spur of self-interest, bethought himself of his wife's only friends, and looked up Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf and her mother. The two women were living in poverty at Troyes on two thousand francs a year. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargeboeuf was one of those fine creatures who believe in marriage for love up to their twenty-fifth year, and change their opinion when they find themselves still unmarried. Vinet managed to persuade Madame de Chargeboeuf to join her means to his and live with his family in Provins, where Bathilde, he assured her, could marry a fool named Rogron, and, clever as she was, take her place in the best society of the place.

The arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf in the lawyer's household was a great reinforcement for the liberal party; and it created consternation among the aristocrats of Provins and also in the Tiphaine clique. Madame de Breautey, horrified to see two women of rank so misled, begged them to come to her. She was shocked that the royalists of Troyes had so neglected the mother and daughter, whose situation she now learned for the first time.

"How is it that no old country gentleman has married that dear girl, who is cut out for a lady of the manor?" she said. "They

have let her run to seed, and now she is to be flung at the head of a Rogron!"

She ransacked the whole department but did not succeed in finding any gentleman willing to marry a girl whose mother had only two thousand francs a year. The "clique" and the subprefect also looked about them with the same object, but they were all too late. Madame de Breautey made terrible charges against the selfishness which degraded France, – the consequence, she said, of materialism, and of the importance now given by the laws to money: nobility was no longer of value! nor beauty either! Such creatures as the Rogrons, the Vinets, could stand up and fight with the King of France!

Bathilde de Chargeboeuf had not only the incontestable superiority of beauty over her rival, but that of dress as well. She was dazzlingly fair. At twenty-five her shoulders were fully developed, and the curves of her beautiful figure were exquisite. The roundness of her throat, the purity of its lines, the wealth of her golden hair, the charming grace of her smile, the distinguished carriage of her head, the character of her features, the fine eyes finely placed beneath a well-formed brow, her every motion, noble and high-bred, and her light and graceful figure, – all were in harmony. Her hands were beautiful, and her feet slender. Health gave her, perhaps, too much the look of a handsome barmaid. "But that can't be a defect in the eyes of a Rogron," sighed Madame Tiphaine. Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf's dress when she made her first appearance

in Provins at the Rogrons' house was very simple. Her brown merino gown edged with green embroidery was worn low-necked; but a tulle fichu, carefully drawn down by hidden strings, covered her neck and shoulders, though it opened a little in front, where its folds were caught together with a *sevine*. Beneath this delicate fabric Bathilde's beauties seemed all the more enticing and coquettish. She took off her velvet bonnet and her shawl on arriving, and showed her pretty ears adorned with what were then called "ear-drops" in gold. She wore a little *jeannette*— a black velvet ribbon with a heart attached — round her throat, where it shone like the jet ring which fantastic nature had fastened round the tail of a white angora cat. She knew all the little tricks of a girl who seeks to marry; her fingers arranged her curls which were not in the least out of order; she entreated Rogron to fasten a cuff-button, thus showing him her wrist, a request which that dazzled fool rudely refused, hiding his emotions under the mask of indifference. The timidity of the only love he was ever to feel in the whole course of his life took an external appearance of dislike. Sylvie and her friend Celeste Habert were deceived by it; not so Vinet, the wise head of this doltish circle, among whom no one really coped with him but the priest, — the colonel being for a long time his ally.

On the other hand the colonel was behaving to Sylvie very much as Bathilde behaved to Rogron. He put on a clean shirt every evening and wore velvet stocks, which set off his martial features and the spotless white of his collar. He adopted the

fashion of white pique waistcoats, and caused to be made for him a new surtout of blue cloth, on which his red rosette glowed finely; all this under pretext of doing honor to the new guests Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He even refrained from smoking for two hours previous to his appearance in the Rogrons' salon. His grizzled hair was brushed in a waving line across a cranium which was ochre in tone. He assumed the air and manner of a party leader, of a man who was preparing to drive out the enemies of France, the Bourbons, on short, to beat of drum.

The satanic lawyer and the wily colonel played the priest and his sister a more cruel trick than even the importation of the beautiful Madame de Chargeboeuf, who was considered by all the Liberal party and by Madame de Breautey and her aristocratic circle to be far handsomer than Madame Tiphaine. These two great statesmen of the little provincial town made everybody believe that the priest was in sympathy with their ideas; so that before long Provins began to talk of him as a liberal ecclesiastic. As soon as this news reached the bishop Monsieur Habert was sent for and admonished to cease his visits to the Rogrons; but his sister continued to go there. Thus the salon Rogron became a fixed fact and a constituted power.

Before the year was out political intrigues were not less lively than the matrimonial schemes of the Rogron salon. While the selfish interests hidden in these hearts were struggling in deadly combat the events which resulted from them had a fatal celebrity.

Everybody knows that the Villele ministry was overthrown by the elections of 1826. Vinet, the Liberal candidate at Provins, who had borrowed money of his notary to buy a domain which made him eligible for election, came very near defeating Monsieur Tiphaine, who saved his election by only two votes. The headquarters of the Liberals was the Rogron salon; among the *habitués* were the notary Cournant and his wife, and Doctor Neraud, whose youth was said to have been stormy, but who now took a serious view of life; he gave himself up to study and was, according to all Liberals, a far more capable man than Monsieur Martener, the aristocratic physician. As for the Rogrons, they no more understood their present triumph than they had formerly understood their ostracism.

The beautiful Bathilde, to whom Vinet had explained Pierrette as an enemy, was extremely disdainful to the girl. It seemed as though everybody's selfish schemes demanded the humiliation of that poor victim. Madame Vinet could do nothing for her, ground as she herself was beneath those implacable self-interests which the lawyer's wife had come at last to see and comprehend. Her husband's imperious will had alone taken her to the Rogron's house, where she had suffered much at the harsh treatment of the pretty little creature, who would often press up against her as if divining her secret thoughts, sometimes asking the poor lady to show her a stitch in knitting or to teach her a bit of embroidery. The child proved in return that if she were treated gently she would understand what was taught her, and succeed in what she

tried to do quite marvellously. But Madame Vinet was soon no longer necessary to her husband's plans, and after the arrival of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf she ceased to visit the Rogrons.

Sylvie, who now indulged in the idea of marrying, began to consider Pierrette as an obstacle. The girl was nearly fourteen; the pallid whiteness of her skin, a symptom of illness entirely overlooked by the ignorant old maid, made her exquisitely lovely. Sylvie took it into her head to balance the cost which Pierrette had been to them by making a servant of her. All the *habitués* of the house to whom she spoke of the matter advised that she should send away Adele. Why shouldn't Pierrette take care of the house and cook? If there was too much work at any time Mademoiselle Rogron could easily employ the colonel's woman-of-all-work, an excellent cook and a most respectable person. Pierrette ought to learn how to cook, and rub floors, and sweep, said the lawyer; every girl should be taught to keep house properly and go to market and know the price of things. The poor little soul, whose self-devotion was equal to her generosity, offered herself willingly, pleased to think that she could earn the bitter bread which she ate in that house. Adele was sent away, and Pierrette thus lost the only person who might have protected her.

In spite of the poor child's strength of heart she was henceforth crushed down physically as well as mentally. Her cousins had less consideration for her than for a servant; she belonged to them! She was scolded for mere nothings, for an atom of dust

left on a glass globe or a marble mantelpiece. The handsome ornaments she had once admired now became odious to her. No matter how she strove to do right, her inexorable cousins always found something to reprove in whatever she did. In the course of two years Pierrette never received the slightest praise, or heard a kindly word. Happiness for her lay in not being scolded. She bore with angelic patience the morose ill-humor of the two celibates, to whom all tender feelings were absolutely unknown, and who daily made her feel her dependence on them.

Such a life for a young girl, pressed as it were between the two chops of a vise, increased her illness. She began to feel violent internal distresses, secret pangs so sudden in their attacks that her strength was undermined and her natural development arrested. By slow degrees and through dreadful, though hidden sufferings, the poor child came to the state in which the companion of her childhood found her when he sang to her his Breton ditty at the dawn of the October day.

VI

AN OLD MAID'S JEALOUSY

Before we relate the domestic drama which the coming of Jacques Brigaut was destined to bring about in the Rogron family it is best to explain how the lad came to be in Provins; for he is, as it were, a somewhat mute personage on the scene.

When he ran from the house Brigaut was not only frightened by Pierrette's gesture, he was horrified by the change he saw in his little friend. He could scarcely recognize the voice, the eyes, the gestures that were once so lively, gay, and withal so tender. When he had gained some distance from the house his legs began to tremble under him; hot flushes ran down his back. He had seen the shadow of Pierrette, but not Pierrette herself! The lad climbed to the Upper town till he found a spot from which he could see the square and the house where Pierrette lived. He gazed at it mournfully, lost in many thoughts, as though he were entering some grief of which he could not see the end. Pierrette was ill; she was not happy; she pined for Brittany – what was the matter with her? All these questions passed and repassed through his heart and rent it, revealing to his own soul the extent of his love for his little adopted sister.

It is extremely rare to find a passion existing between two children of opposite sexes. The charming story of Paul and Virginia does not, any more than this of Pierrette and Brigaut,

answer the question put by that strange moral fact. Modern history offers only the illustrious instance of the Marchesa di Pescara and her husband. Destined to marry by their parents from their earliest years, they adored each other and were married, and their union gave to the sixteenth century the noble spectacle of a perfect conjugal love without a flaw. When the marchesa became a widow at the age of thirty-four, beautiful, intellectually brilliant, universally adored, she refused to marry sovereigns and buried herself in a convent, seeing and knowing thenceforth only nuns. Such was the perfect love that suddenly developed itself in the heart of the Breton workman. Pierrette and he had often protected each other; with what bliss had he given her the money for her journey; he had almost killed himself by running after the diligence when she left him. Pierrette had known nothing of all that; but for him the recollection had warmed and comforted the cold, hard life he had led for the last three years. For Pierrette's sake he had struggled to improve himself; he had learned his trade for Pierrette; he had come to Paris for Pierrette, intending to make his fortune for *her*. After spending a fortnight in the city, he had not been able to hold out against the desire to see her, and he had walked from Saturday night to Monday morning. He intended to return to Paris; but the moving sight of his little friend nailed him to Provins. A wonderful magnetism (still denied in spite of many proofs) acted upon him without his knowledge. Tears rolled from his eyes when they rose in hers. If to her he was Brittany and her happy

childhood, to him she was life itself.

At sixteen years of age Brigaut did not yet know how to draw or to model a cornice; he was ignorant of much, but he had earned, by piece-work done in the leisure of his apprenticeship, some four or five francs a day. On this he could live in Provins and be near Pierrette; he would choose the best cabinet-maker in the town, and learn the rest of his trade in working for him, and thus keep watch over his darling.

Brigaut's mind was made up as he sat there thinking. He went back to Paris and fetched his certificate, tools, and baggage, and three days later he was a journeyman in the establishment of Monsieur Frappier, the best cabinet-maker in Provins. Active, steady workmen, not given to junketing and taverns, are so rare that masters hold to young men like Brigaut when they find them. To end Brigaut's history on this point, we will say here that by the end of the month he was made foreman, and was fed and lodged by Frappier, who taught him arithmetic and line drawing. The house and shop were in the Grand'Rue, not a hundred feet from the little square where Pierrette lived.

Brigaut buried his love in his heart and committed no imprudence. He made Madame Frappier tell him all she knew about the Rogrons. Among other things, she related to him the way in which their father had laid hands on the property of old Auffray, Pierrette's grandfather. Brigaut obtained other information as to the character of the brother and sister. He met Pierrette sometimes in the market with her cousin, and

shuddered to see the heavy basket she was carrying on her arm. On Sundays he went to church to look for her, dressed in her best clothes. There, for the first time, he became aware that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette saw him and made him a hasty sign to keep out of sight. To him, there was a world of things in that little gesture, as there had been, a fortnight earlier, in the sign by which she told him from her window to run away. Ah! what a fortune he must make in the coming ten years in order to marry his little friend, to whom, he was told, the Rogrons were to leave their house, a hundred acres of land, and twelve thousand francs a year, not counting their savings!

The persevering Breton was determined to be thoroughly educated for his trade, and he set about acquiring all the knowledge that he lacked. As long as only the principles of his work were concerned he could learn those in Provins as well as in Paris, and thus remain near Pierrette, to whom he now became anxious to explain his projects and the sort of protection she could rely on from him. He was determined to know the reason of her pallor, and of the debility which was beginning to appear in the organ which is always the last to show the signs of failing life, namely the eyes; he would know, too, the cause of the sufferings which gave her that look as though death were near and she might drop at any moment beneath its scythe. The two signs, the two gestures – not denying their friendship but imploring caution – alarmed the young Breton. Evidently Pierrette wished him to wait and not attempt to see her; otherwise there was danger, there

was peril for her. As she left the church she was able to give him one look, and Brigaut saw that her eyes were full of tears. But he could have sooner squared the circle than have guessed what had happened in the Rogrons' house during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival.

It was not without keen apprehension that Pierrette came downstairs on the morning after Brigaut had invaded her morning dreams like another dream. She was certain that her cousin Sylvie must have heard the song, or she would not have risen and opened her window; but Pierrette was ignorant of the powerful reasons that made the old maid so alert. For the last eight days, strange events and bitter feelings agitated the minds of the chief personages who frequented the Rogron salon. These hidden matters, carefully concealed by all concerned, were destined to fall in their results like an avalanche on Pierrette. Such mysterious things, which we ought perhaps to call the putrescence of the human heart, lie at the base of the greatest revolutions, political, social or domestic; but in telling of them it is desirable to explain that their subtle significance cannot be given in a matter-of-fact narrative. These secret schemes and calculations do not show themselves as brutally and undisguisedly while taking place as they must when the history of them is related. To set down in writing the circumlocutions, oratorical precautions, protracted conversations, and honeyed words glossed over the venom of intentions, would make as long a book as that magnificent poem called "Clarissa Harlowe."

Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Sylvie were equally desirous of marrying, but one was ten years older than the other, and the probabilities of life allowed Celeste Habert to expect that her children would inherit all the Rogron property. Sylvie was forty-two, an age at which marriage is beset by perils. In confiding to each other their ideas, Celeste, instigated by her vindictive brother the priest, enlightened Sylvie as to the dangers she would incur. Sylvie trembled; she was terribly afraid of death, an idea which shakes all celibates to their centre. But just at this time the Martignac ministry came into power, – a Liberal victory which overthrew the Villele administration. The Vinet party now carried their heads high in Provins. Vinet himself became a personage. The Liberals prophesied his advancement; he would certainly be deputy and attorney-general. As for the colonel, he would be made mayor of Provins. Ah, to reign as Madame Garceland, the wife of the present mayor, now reigned! Sylvie could not hold out against that hope; she determined to consult a doctor, though the proceeding would only cover her with ridicule. To consult Monsieur Neraud, the Liberal physician and the rival of Monsieur Martener, would be a blunder. Celeste Habert offered to hide Sylvie in her dressing-room while she herself consulted Monsieur Martener, the physician of her establishment, on this difficult matter. Whether Martener was, or was not, Celeste's accomplice need not be discovered; at any rate, he told his client that even at thirty the danger, though slight, did exist. "But," he added, "with your constitution, you need fear

nothing."

"But how about a woman over forty?" asked Mademoiselle Celeste.

"A married woman who has had children has nothing to fear."

"But I mean an unmarried woman, like Mademoiselle Rogron, for instance?"

"Oh, that's another thing," said Monsieur Martener. "Successful childbirth is then one of those miracles which God sometimes allows himself, but rarely."

"Why?" asked Celeste.

The doctor answered with a terrifying pathological description; he explained that the elasticity given by nature to youthful muscles and bones did not exist at a later age, especially in women whose lives were sedentary.

"So you think that an unmarried woman ought not to marry after forty?"

"Not unless she waits some years," replied the doctor. "But then, of course, it is not marriage, it is only an association of interests."

The result of the interview, clearly, seriously, scientifically and sensibly stated, was that an unmarried woman would make a great mistake in marrying after forty. When the doctor had departed Mademoiselle Celeste found Sylvie in a frightful state, green and yellow, and with the pupils of her eyes dilated.

"Then you really love the colonel?" asked Celeste.

"I still hoped," replied Sylvie.

"Well, then, wait!" cried Mademoiselle Habert, Jesuitically, aware that time would rid her of the colonel.

Sylvie's new devotion to the church warned her that the morality of such a marriage might be doubtful. She accordingly sounded her conscience in the confessional. The stern priest explained the opinions of the Church, which sees in marriage only the propagation of humanity, and rebukes second marriages and all passions but those with a social purpose. Sylvie's perplexities were great. These internal struggles gave extraordinary force to her passion, investing it with that inexplicable attraction which, from the days of Eve, the thing forbidden possesses for women. Mademoiselle Rogron's perturbation did not escape the lynx-eyed lawyer.

One evening, after the game had ended, Vinet approached his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to a sofa.

"Something troubles you," he said.

She nodded sadly. The lawyer let the others depart; Rogron walked home with the Chargeboeuks, and when Vinet was alone with the old maid he wormed the truth out of her.

"Cleverly played, abbe!" thought he. "But you've played into my hands."

The foxy lawyer was more decided in his opinion than even the doctor. He advised marriage in ten years. Inwardly he was vowing that the whole Rogron fortune should go to Bathilde. He rubbed his hands, his pinched lips closed more tightly as he hurried home. The influence exercised by Monsieur Habert, physician of

the soul, and by Vinet, doctor of the purse, balanced each other perfectly. Rogron had no piety in him; so the churchman and the man of law, the black-robed pair, were fairly matched.

On discovering the victory obtained by Celeste, in her anxiety to marry Rogron herself, over Sylvie, torn between the fear of death and the joy of being baronness and mayoress, the lawyer saw his chance of driving the colonel from the battlefield. He knew Rogron well enough to be certain he could marry him to Bathilde; Jerome had already succumbed inwardly to her charms, and Vinet knew that the first time the pair were alone together the marriage would be settled. Rogron had reached the point of keeping his eyes fixed on Celeste, so much did he fear to look at Bathilde. Vinet had now possessed himself of Sylvie's secrets, and saw the force with which she loved the colonel. He fully understood the struggle of such a passion in the heart of an old maid who was also in the grasp of religious emotion, and he saw his way to rid himself of Pierrette and the colonel both by making each the cause of the other's overthrow.

The next day, after the court had risen, Vinet met the colonel and Rogron talking a walk together, according to their daily custom.

Whenever the three men were seen in company the whole town talked of it. This triumvirate, held in horror by the sub-prefect, the magistracy, and the Tiphaine clique, was, on the other hand, a source of pride and vanity to the Liberals of Provins. Vinet was sole editor of the "Courrier" and the head of

the party; the colonel, the working manager, was its arm; Rogron, by means of his purse, its nerves. The Tiphaines declared that the three men were always plotting evil to the government; the Liberals admired them as the defenders of the people. When Rogron turned to go home, recalled by a sense of his dinner-hour, Vinet stopped the colonel from following him by taking Gouraud's arm.

"Well, colonel," he said, "I am going to take a fearful load off your shoulders; you can do better than marry Sylvie; if you play your cards properly you can marry that little Pierrette in two years' time."

He thereupon related the Jesuit's manoeuvre and its effect on Sylvie.

"What a skulking trick!" cried the colonel; "and spreading over years, too!"

"Colonel," said Vinet, gravely, "Pierrette is a charming creature; with her you can be happy for the rest of your life; your health is so sound that the difference in your ages won't seem disproportionate. But, all the same, you mustn't think it an easy thing to change a dreadful fate to a pleasant one. To turn a woman who loves you into a friend and confidant is as perilous a business as crossing a river under fire of the enemy. Cavalry colonel as you are, and daring too, you must study the position and manoeuvre your forces with the same wisdom you have displayed hitherto, and which has won us our present position. If I get to be attorney-general you shall command the department. Oh! if you had been

an elector we should be further advanced than we are now; I should have bought the votes of those two clerks by threatening them with the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority."

The colonel had long been thinking about Pierrette, but he concealed his thoughts with the utmost dissimulation. His roughness to the child was only a mask; but she could not understand why the man who claimed to be her father's old comrade should usually treat her so ill, when sometimes, if he met her alone, he would chuck her under the chin and give her a friendly kiss. But after the conversation with Vinet relating to Sylvie's fears of marriage Gouraud began to seek opportunities to find Pierrette alone; the rough colonel made himself as soft as a cat; he told her how brave her father was and what a misfortune it had been for her that she lost him.

A few days before Brigaut's arrival Sylvie had come suddenly upon Gouraud and Pierrette talking together. Instantly, jealousy rushed into her heart with monastic violence. Jealousy, eminently credulous and suspicious, is the passion in which fancy has most freedom, but for all that it does not give a person intelligence; on the contrary, it hinders them from having any; and in Sylvie's case jealousy only filled her with fantastic ideas. When (a few mornings later) she heard Brigaut's ditty, she jumped to the conclusion that the man who had used the words "Madam' le mariee," addressing them to Pierrette, must be the colonel. She was certain she was right, for she had noticed for a week past a

change in his manners. He was the only man who, in her solitary life, had ever paid her any attention. Consequently she watched him with all her eyes, all her mind; and by giving herself up to hopes that were sometimes flourishing, sometimes blighted, she had brought the matter to such enormous proportions that she saw all things in a mental mirage. To use a common but excellent expression, by dint of looking intently she saw nothing. Alternately she repelled, admitted, and conquered the supposition of this rivalry. She compared herself with Pierrette; she was forty-two years old, with gray hair; Pierrette was delicately fair, with eyes soft enough to warm a withered heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were apt to love young girls of just that kind. Before the colonel had come regularly to the house Sylvie had heard in the Tiphaines' salon strange stories of his life and morals. Old maids preserve in their love-affairs the exaggerated Platonic sentiments which young girls of twenty are wont to profess; they hold to these fixed doctrines like all who have little experience of life and no personal knowledge of how great social forces modify, impair, and bring to nought such grand and noble ideas. The mere thought of being jilted by the colonel was torture to Sylvie's brain. She lay in her bed going over and over her own desires, Pierrette's conduct, and the song which had awakened her with the word "marriage." Like the fool she was, instead of looking through the blinds to see the lover, she opened her window without reflecting that Pierrette would hear her. If she had had the common instinct of a spy she would

have seen Brigaut, and the fatal drama then begun would never have taken place.

It was Pierrette's duty, weak as she was, to take down the bars that closed the wooden shutters of the kitchen, which she opened and fastened back; then she opened in like manner the glass door leading from the corridor to the garden. She took the various brooms that were used for sweeping the carpets, the dining-room, the passages and stairs, together with the other utensils, with a care and particularity which no servant, not even a Dutchwoman, gives to her work. She hated reproof. Happiness for her was in seeing the cold blue pallid eyes of her cousin, not satisfied (that they never were), but calm, after glancing about her with the look of an owner, – that wonderful glance which sees what escapes even the most vigilant eyes of others. Pierrette's skin was moist with her labor when she returned to the kitchen to put it in order, and light the stove that she might carry up hot water to her two cousins (a luxury she never had for herself) and the means of lighting fires in their rooms. After this she laid the table for breakfast and lit the stove in the dining-room. For all these various fires she had to fetch wood and kindling from the cellar, leaving the warm rooms for a damp and chilly atmosphere. Such sudden transitions, made with the quickness of youth, often to escape a harsh word or obey an order, aggravated the condition of her health. She did not know she was ill, and yet she suffered. She began to have strange cravings; she liked raw vegetables and salads, and ate them secretly. The innocent child

was quite unaware that her condition was that of serious illness which needed the utmost care. If Neraud, the Rogrons' doctor, had told this to Pierrette before Brigaut's arrival she would only have smiled; life was so bitter she could smile at death. But now her feelings changed; the child, to whose physical sufferings was added the anguish of Breton homesickness (a moral malady so well-known that colonels in the army allow for it among their men), was suddenly content to be in Provins. The sight of that yellow flower, the song, the presence of her friend, revived her as a plant long without water revives under rain. Unconsciously she wanted to live, and even thought she did not suffer.

Pierrette slipped timidly into her cousin's bedroom, made the fire, left the hot water, said a few words, and went to wake Rogron and do the same offices for him. Then she went down to take in the milk, the bread, and the other provisions left by the dealers. She stood some time on the sill of the door hoping that Brigaut would have the sense to come to her; but by that time he was already on his way to Paris.

She had finished the arrangement of the dining-room and was busy in the kitchen when she heard her cousin Sylvie coming down. Mademoiselle Rogron appeared in a brown silk dressing-gown and a cap with bows; her false front was awry, her night-gown showed above the silk wrapper, her slippers were down at heel. She gave an eye to everything and then came straight to Pierrette, who was awaiting her orders to know what to prepare for breakfast.

"Ha! here you are, lovesick young lady!" said Sylvie, in a mocking tone.

"What is it, cousin?"

"You came into my room like a sly cat, and you crept out the same way, though you knew very well I had something to say to you."

"To me?"

"You had a serenade this morning, as if you were a princess."

"A serenade!" exclaimed Pierrette.

"A serenade!" said Sylvie, mimicking her; "and you've a lover, too."

"What is a lover, cousin?"

Sylvie avoided answering, and said: —

"Do you dare to tell me, mademoiselle, that a man did not come under your window and talk to you of marriage?"

Persecution had taught Pierrette the wariness of slaves; so she answered bravely: —

"I don't know what you mean, —"

"Who means? — your dog?" said Sylvie, sharply.

"I should have said 'cousin,'" replied the girl, humbly.

"And didn't you get up and go in your bare feet to the window? — which will give you an illness; and serve you right, too. And perhaps you didn't talk to your lover, either?"

"No, cousin."

"I know you have many faults, but I did not think you told lies. You had better think this over, mademoiselle; you will have to

explain this affair to your cousin and to me, or your cousin will be obliged to take severe measures."

The old maid, exasperated by jealousy and curiosity, meant to frighten the girl. Pierrette, like all those who suffer more than they have strength to bear, kept silence. Silence is the only weapon by which such victims can conquer; it baffles the Cossack charges of envy, the savage skirmishings of suspicion; it does at times give victory, crushing and complete, – for what is more complete than silence? it is absolute; it is one of the attributes of infinity. Sylvie watched Pierrette narrowly. The girl colored; but the color, instead of rising evenly, came out in patches on her cheekbones, in burning and significant spots. A mother, seeing that symptom of illness, would have changed her tone at once; she would have taken the child on her lap and questioned her; in fact, she would long ago have tenderly understood the signs of Pierrette's pure and perfect innocence; she would have seen her weakness and known that the disturbance of the digestive organs and the other functions of the body was about to affect the lungs. Those eloquent patches would have warned her of an imminent danger. But an old maid, one in whom the family instincts have never been awakened, to whom the needs of childhood and the precautions required for adolescence were unknown, had neither the indulgence nor the compassionate intelligence of a mother; such sufferings as those of Pierrette, instead of softening her heart only made it more callous.

"She blushes, she is guilty!" thought Sylvie.

Pierrette's silence was thus interpreted to her injury.

"Pierrette," continued Sylvie, "before your cousin comes down we must have some talk together. Come," she said, in a rather softer tone, "shut the street door; if any one comes they will rung and we shall hear them."

In spite of the damp mist which was rising from the river, Sylvie took Pierrette along the winding gravel path which led across the lawn to the edge of the rock terrace, – a picturesque little quay, covered with iris and aquatic plants. She now changed her tactics, thinking she might catch Pierrette tripping by softness; the hyena became a cat.

"Pierrette," she said, "you are no longer a child; you are nearly fifteen, and it is not at all surprising that you should have a lover."

"But, cousin," said Pierrette, raising her eyes with angelic sweetness to the cold, sour face of her cousin, "What is a lover?"

It would have been impossible for Sylvie to define a lover with truth and decency to the girl's mind. Instead of seeing in that question the proof of adorable innocence, she considered it a piece of insincerity.

"A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves us and wishes to marry us."

"Ah," said Pierrette, "when that happens in Brittany we call the young man a suitor."

"Well, remember that in owning your feelings for a man you do no wrong, my dear. The wrong is in hiding them. Have you

pleased some of the men who visit here?"

"I don't think so, cousin."

"Do you love any of them?"

"No."

"Certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Look at me, Pierrette."

Pierrette looked at Sylvie.

"A man called to you this morning in the square."

Pierrette lowered her eyes.

"You went to your window, you opened it, and you spoke to him."

"No cousin, I went to look out and I saw a peasant."

"Pierrette, you have much improved since you made your first communion; you have become pious and obedient, you love God and your relations; I am satisfied with you. I don't say this to puff you up with pride."

The horrible creature had mistaken despondency, submission, the silence of wretchedness, for virtues!

The sweetest of all consolations to suffering souls, to martyrs, to artists, in the worst of that divine agony which hatred and envy force upon them, is to meet with praise where they have hitherto found censure and injustice. Pierrette raised her grateful eyes to her cousin, feeling that she could almost forgive her for the sufferings she had caused.

"But if it is all hypocrisy, if I find you a serpent that I have

warmed in my bosom, you will be a wicked girl, an infamous creature!"

"I think I have nothing to reproach myself with," said Pierrette, with a painful revulsion of her heart at the sudden change from unexpected praise to the tones of the hyena.

"You know that to lie is a mortal sin?"

"Yes, cousin."

"Well, you are now under the eye of God," said the old maid, with a solemn gesture towards the sky; "swear to me that you did not know that peasant."

"I will not swear," said Pierrette.

"Ha! he was no peasant, you little viper."

Pierrette rushed away like a frightened fawn terrified at her tone.

Sylvie called her in a dreadful voice.

"The bell is ringing," she answered.

"Artful wretch!" thought Sylvie. "She is depraved in mind; and now I am certain the little adder has wound herself round the colonel. She has heard us say he was a baron. To be a baroness! little fool! Ah! I'll get rid of her, I'll apprentice her out, and soon too!"

Sylvie was so lost in thought that she did not notice her brother coming down the path and bemoaning the injury the frost had done to his dahlias.

"Sylvie! what are you thinking about? I thought you were looking at the fish; sometimes they jump out of the water."

"No," said Sylvie.

"How did you sleep?" and he began to tell her about his own dreams. "Don't you think my skin is getting *tabid*?" – a word in the Rogron vocabulary.

Ever since Rogron had been in love, – but let us not profane the word, – ever since he had desired to marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, he was very uneasy about himself and his health. At this moment Pierrette came down the garden steps and called to them from a distance that breakfast was ready. At sight of her cousin, Sylvie's skin turned green and yellow, her bile was in commotion. She looked at the floor of the corridor and declared that Pierrette ought to rub it.

"I will rub it now if you wish," said the little angel, not aware of the injury such work may do to a young girl.

The dining-room was irreproachably in order. Sylvie sat down and pretended all through breakfast to want this, that, and the other thing which she would never have thought of in a quieter moment, and which she now asked for only to make Pierrette rise again and again just as the child was beginning to eat her food. But such mere teasing was not enough; she wanted a subject on which to find fault, and was angry with herself for not finding one. She scarcely answered her brother's silly remarks, yet she looked at him only; her eyes avoided Pierrette. Pierrette was deeply conscious of all this. She brought the milk mixed with cream for each cousin in a large silver goblet, after heating it carefully in the *bain-marie*. The brother and sister poured in

the coffee made by Sylvie herself on the table. When Sylvie had carefully prepared hers, she saw an atom of coffee-grounds floating on the surface. On this the storm broke forth.

"What is the matter?" asked Rogron.

"The matter is that mademoiselle has put dust in my milk. Do you suppose I am going to drink coffee with ashes in it? Well, I am not surprised; no one can do two things at once. She wasn't thinking of the milk! a blackbird might have flown through the kitchen to-day and she wouldn't have seen it! how should she see the dust flying! and then it was my coffee, ha! that didn't signify!"

As she spoke she was laying on the side of her plate the coffee-grounds that had run through the filter.

"But, cousin, that is coffee," said Pierrette.

"Oh! then it is I who tell lies, is it?" cried Sylvie, looking at Pierrette and blasting her with a fearful flash of anger from her eyes.

Organizations which have not been exhausted by powerful emotions often have a vast amount of the vital fluid at their service. This phenomenon of the extreme clearness of the eye in moments of anger was the more marked in Mademoiselle Rogron because she had often exercised the power of her eyes in her shop by opening them to their full extent for the purpose of inspiring her dependents with salutary fear.

"You had better dare to give me the lie!" continued Sylvie; "you deserve to be sent from the table to go and eat by yourself in the kitchen."

"What's the matter with you two?" cried Rogron, "you are as cross as bears this morning."

"Mademoiselle knows what I have against her," said Sylvie. "I leave her to make up her mind before speaking to you; for I mean to show her more kindness than she deserves."

Pierrette was looking out of the window to avoid her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

"Look at her! she pays no more attention to what I am saying than if I were that sugar-basin! And yet mademoiselle has a sharp ear; she can hear and answer from the top of the house when some one talks to her from below. She is perversity itself, – perversity, I say; and you needn't expect any good of her; do you hear me, Jerome?"

"What has she done wrong?" asked Rogron.

"At her age, too! to begin so young!" screamed the angry old maid.

Pierrette rose to clear the table and give herself something to do, for she could hardly bear the scene any longer. Though such language was not new to her, she had never been able to get used to it. Her cousin's rage seemed to accuse her of some crime. She imagined what her fury would be if she came to know about Brigaut. Perhaps her cousin would have him sent away, and she should lose him! All the many thoughts, the deep and rapid thoughts of a slave came to her, and she resolved to keep absolute silence about a circumstance in which her conscience told her there was nothing wrong. But the cruel, bitter words she had been

made to hear and the wounding suspicion so shocked her that as she reached the kitchen she was taken with a convulsion of the stomach and turned deadly sick. She dared not complain; she was not sure that any one would help her. When she returned to the dining-room she was white as a sheet, and, saying she was not well, she started to go to bed, dragging herself up step by step by the baluster and thinking that she was going to die. "Poor Brigaut!" she thought.

"The girl is ill," said Rogron.

"She ill! That's only *shamming*," replied Sylvie, in a loud voice that Pierrette might hear. "She was well enough this morning, I can tell you."

This last blow struck Pierrette to the earth; she went to bed weeping and praying to God to take her out of this world.

VII

DOMESTIC TYRANNY

For a month past Rogron had ceased to carry the "Constitutionnel" to Gouraud; the colonel came obsequiously to fetch his paper, gossip a little, and take Rogron off to walk if the weather was fine. Sure of seeing the colonel and being able to question him, Sylvie dressed herself as coquettishly as she knew how. The old maid thought she was attractive in a green gown, a yellow shawl with a red border, and a white bonnet with straggling gray feathers. About the hour when the colonel usually came Sylvie stationed herself in the salon with her brother, whom she had compelled to stay in the house in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"It is a fine day, colonel," said Rogron, when Gouraud with his heavy step entered the room. "But I'm not dressed; my sister wanted to go out, and I was going to keep the house. Wait for me; I'll be ready soon."

So saying, Rogron left Sylvie alone with the colonel.

"Where were you going? you are dressed divinely," said Gouraud, who noticed a certain solemnity on the pock-marked face of the old maid.

"I wanted very much to go out, but my little cousin is ill, and I cannot leave her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"I don't know; she had to go to bed."

Gouraud's caution, not to say his distrust, was constantly excited by the results of his alliance with Vinet. It certainly appeared that the lawyer had got the lion's share in their enterprise. Vinet controlled the paper, he reigned as sole master over it, he took the revenues; whereas the colonel, the responsible editor, earned little. Vinet and Cournant had done the Rogrons great services; whereas Gouraud, a colonel on half-pay, could do nothing. Who was to be deputy? Vinet. Who was the chief authority in the party? Vinet. Whom did the liberals all consult? Vinet. Moreover, the colonel knew fully as well as Vinet himself the extent and depth of the passion suddenly aroused in Rogron by the beautiful Bathilde de Chargeboeuf. This passion had now become intense, like all the last passions of men. Bathilde's voice made him tremble. Absorbed in his desires Rogron hid them; he dared not hope for such a marriage. To sound him, the colonel mentioned that he was thinking himself of asking for Bathilde's hand. Rogron turned pale at the thought of such a formidable rival, and had since then shown coldness and even hatred to Gouraud.

Thus Vinet reigned supreme in the Rogron household while he, the colonel, had no hold there except by the extremely hypothetical tie of his mendacious affection for Sylvie, which it was not yet clear that Sylvie reciprocated. When the lawyer told him of the priest's manoeuvre, and advised him to break with Sylvie and marry Pierrette, he certainly flattered Gouraud's

foible; but after analyzing the inner purpose of that advice and examining the ground all about him, the colonel thought he perceived in his ally the intention of separating him from Sylvie, and profiting by her fears to throw the whole Rogron property into the hands of Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf.

Therefore, when the colonel was left alone with Sylvie his perspicacity possessed itself immediately of certain signs which betrayed her uneasiness. He saw at once that she was under arms and had made this plan for seeing him alone. As he already suspected Vinet of playing him some trick, he attributed the conference to the instigation of the lawyer, and was instantly on his guard, as he would have been in an enemy's country, – with an eye all about him, an ear to the faintest sound, his mind on the *qui vive*, and his hand on a weapon. The colonel had the defect of never believing a single word said to him by a woman; so that when the old maid brought Pierrette on the scene, and told him she had gone to bed before midday, he concluded that Sylvie had locked her up by way of punishment and out of jealousy.

"She is getting to be quite pretty, that little thing," he said with an easy air.

"She will be pretty," replied Mademoiselle Rogron.

"You ought to send her to Paris and put her in a shop," continued the colonel. "She would make her fortune. The milliners all want pretty girls."

"Is that really your advice?" asked Sylvie, in a troubled voice.

"Good!" thought the colonel, "I was right. Vinet advised me

to marry Pierrette just to spoil my chance with the old harridan. But," he said aloud, "what else can you do with her? There's that beautiful girl Bathilde de Chargeboeuf, noble and well-connected, reduced to single-blessedness, – nobody will have her. Pierrette has nothing, and she'll never marry. As for beauty, what is it? To me, for example, youth and beauty are nothing; for haven't I been a captain of cavalry in the imperial guard, and carried my spurs into all the capitals of Europe, and known all the handsomest women of these capitals? Don't talk to me; I tell you youth and beauty are devilishly common and silly. At forty-eight," he went on, adding a few years to his age, to match Sylvie's, "after surviving the retreat from Moscow and going through that terrible campaign of France, a man is broken down; I'm nothing but an old fellow now. A woman like you would pet me and care for me, and her money, joined to my poor pension, would give me ease in my old days; of course I should prefer such a woman to a little minx who would worry the life out of me, and be thirty years old, with passions, when I should be sixty, with rheumatism. At my age, a man considers and calculates. To tell you the truth between ourselves, I should not wish to have children."

Sylvie's face was an open book to the colonel during this tirade, and her next question proved to him Vinet's perfidy.

"Then you don't love Pierrette?" she said.

"Heavens! are you out of your mind, my dear Sylvie?" he cried. "Can those who have no teeth crack nuts? Thank God I've

got some common-sense and know what I'm about."

Sylvie thus reassured resolved not to show her own hand, and thought herself very shrewd in putting her own ideas into her brother's mouth.

"Jerome," she said, "thought of the match."

"How could your brother take up such an incongruous idea? Why, it is only a few days ago that, in order to find out his secrets, I told him I loved Bathilde. He turned as white as your collar."

"My brother! does he love Bathilde?" asked Sylvie.

"Madly, – and yet Bathilde is only after his money." ("One for you, Vinet!" thought the colonel.) "I can't understand why he should have told you that about Pierrette. No, Sylvie," he said, taking her hand and pressing it in a certain way, "since you have opened this matter" (he drew nearer to her), "well" (he kissed her hand; as a cavalry captain he had already proved his courage), "let me tell you that I desire no wife but you. Though such a marriage may look like one of convenience, I feel, on my side, a sincere affection for you."

"But if I *wish* you to marry Pierrette? if I leave her my fortune – eh, colonel?"

"But I don't want to be miserable in my home, and in less than ten years see a popinjay like Julliard hovering round my wife and addressing verses to her in the newspapers. I'm too much of a man to stand that. No, I will never make a marriage that is disproportionate in age."

"Well, colonel, we will talk seriously of this another time,"

said Sylvie, casting a glance upon him which she supposed to be full of love, though, in point of fact, it was a good deal like that of an ogress. Her cold, blue lips of a violet tinge drew back from the yellow teeth, and she thought she smiled.

"I'm ready," said Rogron, coming in and carrying off the colonel, who bowed in a lover-like way to the old maid.

Gouraud determined to press on his marriage with Sylvie, and make himself master of the house; resolving to rid himself, through his influence over Sylvie during the honeymoon, of Bathilde and Celeste Habert. So, during their walk, he told Rogron he had been joking the other day; that he had no real intention of aspiring to Bathilde; that he was not rich enough to marry a woman without fortune; and then he confided to him his real wishes, declaring that he had long chosen Sylvie for her good qualities, – in short, he aspired to the honor of being Rogron's brother-in-law.

"Ah, colonel, my dear baron! if nothing is wanting but my consent you have it with no further delay than the law requires," cried Rogron, delighted to be rid of his formidable rival.

Sylvie spent the morning in her own room considering how the new household could be arranged. She determined to build a second storey for her brother and to furnish the rest for herself and her husband; but she also resolved, in the true old-maidish spirit, to subject the colonel to certain proofs by which to judge of his heart and his morals before she finally committed herself. She was still suspicious, and wanted to make sure that Pierrette

had no private intercourse with the colonel.

Pierrette came down before the dinner-hour to lay the table. Sylvie had been forced to cook the dinner, and had sworn at that "cursed Pierrette" for a spot she had made on her gown, – wasn't it plain that if Pierrette had done her own work Sylvie wouldn't have got that grease-spot on her silk dress?

"Oh, here you are, *peakling*? You are like the dog of the marshal who woke up as soon as the saucepans rattled. Ha! you want us to think you are ill, you little liar!"

That idea: "You did not tell the truth about what happened in the square this morning, therefore you lie in everything," was a hammer with which Sylvie battered the head and also the heart of the poor girl incessantly.

To Pierrette's great astonishment Sylvie sent her to dress in her best clothes after dinner. The liveliest imagination is never up to the level of the activity which suspicion excites in the mind of an old maid. In this particular case, this particular old maid carried the day against politicians, lawyers, notaries, and all other self-interests. Sylvie determined to consult Vinet, after examining herself into all the suspicious circumstances. She kept Pierrette close to her, so as to find out from the girl's face whether the colonel had told her the truth.

On this particular evening the Chargeboeuf ladies were the first to arrive. Bathilde, by Vinet's advice, had become more elaborate in her dress. She now wore a charming gown of blue velveteen, with the same transparent fichu, garnet pendants in

her ears, her hair in ringlets, the wily *jeannette* round her throat, black satin slippers, gray silk stockings, and *gants de Suede*; add to these things the manners of a queen and the coquetry of a young girl determined to capture Rogron. Her mother, calm and dignified, retained, as did her daughter, a certain aristocratic insolence, with which the two women hedged themselves and preserved the spirit of their caste. Bathilde was a woman of intelligence, a fact which Vinet alone had discovered during the two months' stay the ladies had made at his house. When he had fully fathomed the mind of the girl, wounded and disappointed as it was by the fruitlessness of her beauty and her youth, and enlightened by the contempt she felt for the men of a period in which money was the only idol, Vinet, himself surprised, exclaimed, —

"If I could only have married you, Bathilde, I should to-day be Keeper of the Seals. I should call myself Vinet de Chargeboeuf, and take my seat as deputy of the Right."

Bathilde had no vulgar idea in her marriage intentions. She did not marry to be a mother, nor to possess a husband; she married for freedom, to gain a responsible position, to be called "madame," and to act as men act. Rogron was nothing but a name to her; she expected to make something of the fool, — a voting deputy, for instance, whose instigator she would be; moreover, she longed to avenge herself on her family, who had taken no notice of a girl without money. Vinet had much enlarged and strengthened her ideas by admiring and approving them.

"My dear Bathilde," he said, while explaining to her the influence of women, and showing her the sphere of action in which she ought to work, "do you suppose that Tiphaine, a man of the most ordinary capacity, could ever get to be a judge of the Royal court in Paris by himself? No, it is Madame Tiphaine who has got him elected deputy, and it is she who will push him when they get to Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a shrewd woman, who does what she likes with the famous banker du Tillet, a crony of Nucingen, and both of them allies of the Kellers. The administration is on the best of terms with those lynxes of the bank. There is no reason why Tiphaine should not be judge, through his wife, of a Royal court. Marry Rogron; we'll have him elected deputy from Provins as soon as I gain another precinct in the Seine-et-Marne. You can then get him a place as receiver-general, where he'll have nothing to do but sign his name. We shall belong to the opposition *if* the Liberals triumph, but if the Bourbons remain – ah! then we shall lean gently, gently towards the centre. Besides, you must remember Rogron can't live forever, and then you can marry a titled man. In short, put yourself in a good position, and the Chargeboeufs will be ready enough to serve us. Your poverty has no doubt taught you, as mine did me, to know what men are worth. We must make use of them as we do of post-horses. A man, or a woman, will take us along to such or such a distance."

Vinet ended by making Bathilde a small edition of Catherine de Medicis. He left his wife at home, rejoiced to be alone with

her two children, while he went every night to the Rogrons' with Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf. He arrived there in all the glory of better circumstances. His spectacles were of gold, his waistcoat silk; a white cravat, black trousers, thin boots, a black coat made in Paris, and a gold watch and chain, made up his apparel. In place of the former Vinet, pale and thin, snarling and gloomy, the present Vinet bore himself with the air and manner of a man of importance; he marched boldly forward, certain of success, with that peculiar show of security which belongs to lawyers who know the hidden places of the law. His sly little head was well-brushed, his chin well-shaved, which gave him a mincing though frigid look, that made him seem agreeable in the style of Robespierre. Certainly he would make a fine attorney-general, endowed with elastic, mischievous, and even murderous eloquence, or an orator of the shrewd type of Benjamin Constant. The bitterness and the hatred which formerly actuated him had now turned into soft-spoken perfidy; the poison was transformed into anodyne.

"Good-evening, my dear; how are you?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf, greeting Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, took off her bonnet, looked at herself in the glass, and placed her pretty foot on the fender that Rogron might admire it.

"What is the matter with you?" she said to him, looking directly in his face. "You have not bowed to me. Pray why should we put on our best velvet gowns to please you?"

She pushed past Pierrette to lay down her hat, which the latter took from her hand, and which she let her take exactly as though she were a servant. Men are supposed to be ferocious, and tigers too; but neither tigers, vipers, diplomatists, lawyers, executioners or kings ever approach, in their greatest atrocities, the gentle cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage disdain of one young woman for another, when she thinks herself superior in birth, or fortune, or grace, and some question of marriage, or precedence, or any of the feminine rivalries, is raised. The "Thank you, mademoiselle," which Bathilde said to Pierrette was a poem in many strophes. She was named Bathilde, and the other Pierrette. She was a Chargeboeuf, the other a Lorrain. Pierrette was small and weak, Bathilde was tall and full of life. Pierrette was living on charity, Bathilde and her mother lived on their means. Pierrette wore a stuff gown with a chemisette, Bathilde made the velvet of hers undulate. Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, and the arm of a queen; Pierrette's shoulder-blades were skin and bone. Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde was the fairy. Bathilde was about to marry, Pierrette was to die a maid. Bathilde was adored, Pierrette was loved by none. Bathilde's hair was ravishingly dressed, she had so much taste; Pierrette's was hidden beneath her Breton cap, and she knew nothing of the fashions. Moral, Bathilde was everything, Pierrette nothing. The proud little Breton girl understood this tragic poem.

"Good-evening, little girl," said Madame de Chargeboeuf,

from the height of her condescending grandeur, and in the tone of voice which her pinched nose gave her.

Vinet put the last touch to this sort of insult by looking fixedly at Pierrette and saying, in three keys, "Oh! oh! oh! how fine we are to-night, Pierrette!"

"Fine!" said the poor child; "you should say that to Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, not to me."

"Oh! she is always beautifully dressed," replied the lawyer. "Isn't she, Rogron?" he added, turning to the master of the house, and grasping his hand.

"Yes," said Rogron.

"Why do you force him to say what he does not think?" said Bathilde; "nothing about me pleases him. Isn't that true?" she added, going up to Rogron and standing before him. "Look at me, and say if it isn't true."

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and gently closed his eyes like a cat whose head is being scratched.

"You are too beautiful," he said; "too dangerous."

"Why?"

Rogron looked at the fire and was silent. Just then Mademoiselle Habert entered the room, followed by the colonel.

Celeste Habert, who had now become the common enemy, could only reckon Sylvie on her side; nevertheless, everybody present showed her the more civility and amiable attention because each was undermining her. Her brother, though no longer able to be on the scene of action, was well aware of what

was going on, and as soon as he perceived that his sister's hopes were killed he became an implacable and terrible antagonist to the Rogrons.

Every one will immediately picture to themselves Mademoiselle Habert when they know that if she had not kept an institution for young ladies she would still have had the air of a school-mistress. School-mistresses have a way of their own in putting on their caps. Just as old Englishwomen have acquired a monopoly in turbans, school-mistresses have a monopoly of these caps. Flowers nod above the frame-work, flowers that are more than artificial; lying by in closets for years the cap is both new and old, even on the day it is first worn. These spinsters make it a point of honor to resemble the lay figures of a painter; they sit on their hips, never on their chairs. When any one speaks to them they turn their whole busts instead of simply turning their heads; and when their gowns creak one is tempted to believe that the mechanism of these beings is out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, an ideal of her species, had a stern eye, a grim mouth, and beneath her wrinkled chin the strings of her cap, always limp and faded, floated as she moved. Two moles, rather large and brown, adorned that chin, and from them sprouted hairs which she allowed to grow rampant like clematis. And finally, to complete her portrait, she took snuff, and took it ungracefully.

The company went to work at their boston. Mademoiselle Habert sat opposite to Sylvie, with the colonel at her side opposite to Madame de Chargeboeuf. Bathilde was near her mother and

Rogron. Sylvie placed Pierrette between herself and the colonel; Rogron had set out a second card-table, in case other company arrived. Two lamps were on the chimney-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by candles at forty sous a pound, paid for by the price of the cards.

"Come, Pierrette, take your work, my dear," said Sylvie, with treacherous softness, noticing that the girl was watching the colonel's game.

She usually affected to treat Pierrette well before company. This deception irritated the honest Breton girl, and made her despise her cousin. She took her embroidery, but as she drew her stitches she still watched Gouraud's play. Gouraud behaved as if he did not know the girl was near him. Sylvie noticed this apparent indifference and thought it extremely suspicious. Presently she undertook a *grande misere* in hearts, the pool being full of counters, besides containing twenty-seven sous. The rest of the company had now arrived; among them the deputy-judge Desfondrilles, who for the last two months had abandoned the Tiphaine party and connected himself more or less with the Vinets. He was standing before the chimney-piece, with his back to the fire and the tails of his coat over his arms, looking round the fine salon of which Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf was the shining ornament; for it really seemed as if all the reds of its decoration had been made expressly to enhance her style of beauty. Silence reigned; Pierrette was watching the game, Sylvie's attention was distracted from her by the interest of the

grande misere.

"Play that," said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart in his hand.

The colonel began a sequence in hearts; the hearts all lay between himself and Sylvie; the colonel won her ace, though it was protected by five small hearts.

"That's not fair!" she cried. "Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel took her advice."

"But, mademoiselle," said Celeste, "it was the colonel's game to play hearts after you began them."

The scene made Monsieur Desfondrilles smile; his was a keen mind, which found much amusement in watching the play of all the self-interests in Provins.

"Yes, it was certainly the colonel's game," said Cournant the notary, not knowing what the question was.

Sylvie threw a look at Mademoiselle Habert, – one of those glances which pass from old maid to old maid, feline and cruel.

"Pierrette, you did see my hand," said Sylvie fixing her eyes on the girl.

"No, cousin."

"I was looking at you all," said the deputy-judge, "and I can swear that Pierrette saw no one's hand but the colonel's."

"Pooh!" said Gouraud, alarmed, "little girls know how to slide their eyes into everything."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"Yes," continued Gouraud. "I dare say she looked into your

hand to play you a trick. Didn't you, little one?"

"No," said the truthful Breton, "I wouldn't do such a thing; if I had, it would have been in my cousin's interests."

"You know you are a story-teller and a little fool," cried Sylvie. "After what happened this morning do you suppose I can believe a word you say? You are a – "

Pierrette did not wait for Sylvie to finish her sentence; foreseeing a torrent of insults, she rushed away without a light and ran to her room. Sylvie turned white with anger and muttered between her teeth, "She shall pay for this!"

"Shall you pay for the *misere*?" said Madame de Chargeboeuf.

As she spoke Pierrette struck her head against the door of the passage which some one had left open.

"Good! I'm glad of it," cried Sylvie, as they heard the blow.

"She must be hurt," said Desfondrilles.

"She deserves it," replied Sylvie.

"It was a bad blow," said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie thought she might escape paying her *misere* if she went to see after Pierrette, but Madame de Chargeboeuf stopped her.

"Pay us first," she said, laughing; "you will forget it when you come back."

The remark, based on the old maid's trickery and her bad faith in paying her debts at cards was approved by the others. Sylvie sat down and thought no more of Pierrette, – an indifference which surprised no one. When the game was over, about half past nine o'clock, she flung herself into an easy chair at the corner of the

fireplace and did not even rise as her guests departed. The colonel was torturing her; she did not know what to think of him.

"Men are so false!" she cried, as she went to bed.

Pierrette had given herself a frightful blow on the head, just above the ear, at the spot where young girls part their hair when they put their "front hair" in curlpapers. The next day there was a large swelling.

"God has punished you," said Sylvie at the breakfast table. "You disobeyed me; you treated me with disrespect in leaving the room before I had finished my sentence; you got what you deserved."

"Nevertheless," said Rogron, "she ought to put on a compress of salt and water."

"Oh, it is nothing at all, cousin," said Pierrette.

The poor child had reached a point where even such a remark seemed to her a proof of kindness.

VIII

THE LOVES OF JACQUES AND PIERRETTE

The week ended as it had begun, in continual torture. Sylvie grew ingenious, and found refinements of tyranny with almost savage cruelty; the red Indians might have taken a lesson from her. Pierrette dared not complain of her vague sufferings, nor of the actual pains she now felt in her head. The origin of her cousin's present anger was the non-revelation of Brigaut's arrival. With Breton obstinacy Pierrette was determined to keep silence, — a resolution that is perfectly explicable. It is easy to see how her thoughts turned to Brigaut, fearing some danger for him if he were discovered, yet instinctively longing to have him near her, and happy in knowing he was in Provins. What joy to have seen him! That single glimpse was like the look an exile casts upon his country, or the martyr lifts to heaven, where his eyes, gifted with second-sight, can enter while flames consume his body.

Pierrette's glance had been so thoroughly understood by the major's son that, as he planed his planks or took his measures or joined his wood, he was working his brains to find out some way of communicating with her. He ended by choosing the simplest of all schemes. At a certain hour of the night Pierrette must lower

a letter by a string from her window. In the midst of the girl's own sufferings, she too was sustained by the hope of being able to communicate with Brigaut. The same desire was in both hearts; parted, they understood each other! At every shock to her heart, every throb of pain in her head, Pierrette said to herself, "Brigaut is here!" and that thought enabled her to live without complaint.

One morning in the market, Brigaut, lying in wait, was able to get near her. Though he saw her tremble and turn pale, like an autumn leaf about to flutter down, he did not lose his head, but quietly bought fruit of the market-woman with whom Sylvie was bargaining. He found his chance of slipping a note to Pierrette, all the while joking the woman with the ease of a man accustomed to such manoeuvres; so cool was he in action, though the blood hummed in his ears and rushed boiling through his veins and arteries. He had the firmness of a galley-slave without, and the shrinkings of innocence within him, – like certain mothers in their moments of mortal trial, when held between two dangers, two catastrophes.

Pierrette's inward commotion was like Brigaut's. She slipped the note into the pocket of her apron. The hectic spots upon her cheekbones turned to a cherry-scarlet. These two children went through, all unknown to themselves, many more emotions than go to the make-up of a dozen ordinary loves. This moment in the market-place left in their souls a well-spring of passionate feeling. Sylvie, who did not recognize the Breton accent, took no notice of Brigaut, and Pierrette went home safely with her

treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were fated to serve as documents in a terrible judicial inquiry; otherwise, without the fatal circumstances that occasioned that inquiry, they would never have been heard of. Here is the one which Pierrette read that night in her chamber: —

My dear Pierrette, — At midnight, when everybody is asleep but me, who am watching you, I will come every night under your window. Let down a string long enough to reach me; it will not make any noise; you must fasten to the end of it whatever you write to me. I will tie my letter in the same way. I hear *they* have taught you to read and write, — those wicked relations who were to do you good, and have done you so much harm. You, Pierrette, the daughter of a colonel who died for France, reduced by those monsters to be their servant! That is where all your pretty color and health have gone. My Pierrette, what has become of her? what have they done with her. I see plainly you are not the same, not happy. Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Brittany. I can earn enough now to give you what you need; for you yourself can earn three francs a day and I can earn four or five; and thirty sous is all I want to live on. Ah! Pierrette, how I have prayed the good God for you ever since I came here! I have asked him to give me all your sufferings, and you all pleasures. Why do you stay with them? why do they keep you? Your grandmother is more to you than they. They are vipers; they have taken your gaiety away from you. You do not even walk as you once did in Brittany. Let us go back.

I am here to serve you, to do your will; tell me what you wish. If you need money I have a hundred and fifty francs; I can send them up by the string, though I would like to kiss your dear hands and lay the money in them. Ah, dear Pierrette, it is a long time now that the blue sky has been overcast for me. I have not had two hours' happiness since I put you into that diligence of evil. And when I saw you the other morning, looking like a shadow, I could not reach you; that hag of a cousin came between us. But at least we can have the consolation of praying to God together every Sunday in church; perhaps he will hear us all the more when we pray together.

Not good-by, my dear, Pierrette, but *to-night*.

This letter so affected Pierrette that she sat for more than an hour reading and re-reading and gazing at it. Then she remembered with anguish that she had nothing to write with. She summoned courage to make the difficult journey from her garret to the dining-room, where she obtained pen, paper, and ink, and returned safely without waking her terrible cousin. A few minutes before midnight she had finished the following letter: —

My Friend, — Oh! yes, my friend; for there is no one but you, Jacques, and my grandmother to love me. God forgive me, but you are the only two persons whom I love, both alike, neither more nor less. I was too little to know my dear mamma; but you, Jacques, and my grandmother, and my grandfather, — God grant him heaven, for he suffered much from his ruin, which was mine, — but you two who are left, I

love you both, unhappy as I am. Indeed, to know how much I love you, you will have to know how much I suffer; but I don't wish that, it would grieve you too much. *They* speak to me as we would not speak to a dog; *they* treat me like the worst of girls; and yet I do examine myself before God, and I cannot find that I do wrong by them. Before you sang to me the marriage song I saw the mercy of God in my sufferings; for I had prayed to him to take me from the world, and I felt so ill I said to myself, "God hears me!" But, Jacques, now you are here, I want to live and go back to Brittany, to my grandmamma who loves me, though *they* say she stole eight thousand francs of mine. Jacques, is that so? If they are mine could you get them! But it is not true, for if my grandmother had eight thousand francs she would not live at Saint-Jacques.

I don't want to trouble her last days, my kind, good grandmamma, with the knowledge of my troubles; she might die of it. Ah! if she knew they made her grandchild scrub the pots and pans, – she who used to say to me, when I wanted to help her after her troubles, "Don't touch that, my darling; leave it – leave it – you will spoil your pretty fingers." Ah! my hands are never clean now. Sometimes I can hardly carry the basket home from market, it cuts my arm. Still I don't think my cousins mean to be cruel; but it is their way always to scold, and it seems that I have no right to leave them. My cousin Rogron is my guardian. One day when I wanted to run away because I could not bear it, and told them so, my cousin Sylvie said the gendarmes would go after me, for the law was my master. Oh! I know now

that cousins cannot take the place of father or mother, any more than the saints can take the place of God.

My poor Jacques, what do you suppose I could do with your money? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how I think of you and Pen-Hoel, and the big pong, – that's where we had our only happy days. I shall have no more, for I feel I am going from bad to worse. I am very ill, Jacques. I have dreadful pains in my head, and in my bones, and back, which kill me, and I have no appetite except for horrid things, – roots and leaves and such things. Sometimes I cry, when I am all alone, for they won't let me do anything I like if they know it, not even cry. I have to hide to offer my tears to Him to whom we owe the mercies which we call afflictions. It must have been He who gave you the blessed thought to come and sing the marriage song beneath my window. Ah! Jacques, my cousin heard you, and she said I had a lover. If you wish to be my lover, love me well. I promise to love you always, as I did in the past, and to be

Your faithful servant,

Pierrette Lorrain.

You will love me always, won't you?

She had brought a crust of bread from the kitchen, in which she now made a hole for the letter, and fastened it like a weight to her string. At midnight, having opened her window with extreme caution, she lowered the letter with the crust, which made no noise against either the wall of the house or the blinds. Presently she felt the string pulled by Brigaut, who broke it and then crept softly away. When he reached the middle of the square she could

see him indistinctly by the starlight; but he saw her quite clearly in the zone of light thrown by the candle. The two children stood thus for over an hour, Pierrette making him signs to go, he starting, she remaining, he coming back to his post, and Pierrette again signing that he must leave her. This was repeated till the child closed her window, went to bed, and blew out the candle. Once in bed she fell asleep, happy in heart though suffering in body, – she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept as the persecuted sleep, – a slumber bright with angels; that slumber full of heavenly arabesques, in atmospheres of gold and lapis-lazuli, perceived and given to us by Raffaele.

The moral nature had such empire over that frail physical nature that on the morrow Pierrette rose light and joyous as a lark, as radiant and as gay. Such a change could not escape the vigilant eye of her cousin Sylvie, who, this time, instead of scolding her, set about watching her with the scrutiny of a magpie. "What reason is there for such happiness?" was a thought of jealousy, not of tyranny. If the colonel had not been in Sylvie's mind she would have said to Pierrette as formerly, "Pierrette, you are very noise, and very regardless of what you have often been told." But now the old maid resolved to spy upon her as only old maids can spy. The day was still and gloomy, like the weather that precedes a storm.

"You don't appear to be ill now, mademoiselle," said Sylvie at dinner. "Didn't I tell you she put it all on to annoy us?" she cried, addressing her brother, and not waiting for Pierrette's answer.

"On the contrary, cousin, I have a sort of fever – "

"Fever! what fever? You are as gay as a lark. Perhaps you have seen some one again?"

Pierrette trembled and dropped her eyes on her plate.

"Tartufe!" cried Sylvie; "and only fourteen years old! what a nature!"

Do you mean to come to a bad end?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Pierrette, raising her sweet and luminous brown eyes to her cousin.

"This evening," said Sylvie, "you are to stay in the dining-room with a candle, and do your sewing. You are not wanted in the salon; I sha'n't have you looking into my hand to help your favorites."

Pierrette made no sign.

"Artful creature!" cried Sylvie, leaving the room.

Rogron, who did not understand his sister's anger, said to Pierrette: "What is all this about? Try to please your cousin, Pierrette; she is very indulgent to you, very gentle, and if you put her out of temper the fault is certainly yours. Why do you squabble so? For my part I like to live in peace. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde and take pattern by her."

Pierrette felt able to bear everything. Brigaut would come at midnight and bring her an answer, and that hope was the viaticum of her day. But she was using up her last strength. She did not go to bed, and stood waiting for the hour to strike. At last midnight sounded; softly she opened the window; this time she used a

string made by tying bits of twine together. She heard Brigaut's step, and on drawing up the cord she found the following letter, which filled her with joy: —

My dear Pierrette, — As you are so ill you must not tire yourself by waiting for me. You will hear me if I cry like an owl. Happily my father taught me to imitate their note. So when you hear the cry three times you will know I am there, and then you must let down the cord. But I shall not come again for some days. I hope then to bring you good news.

Oh! Pierrette, don't talk of dying! Pierrette, don't think such things! All my heart shook, I felt as though I were dead myself at the mere idea. No, my Pierrette, you must not die; you will live happy, and soon you shall be delivered from your persecutors. If I do not succeed in what I am undertaking for your rescue, I shall appeal to the law, and I shall speak out before heaven and earth and tell how your wicked relations are treating you. I am certain that you have not many more days to suffer; have patience, my Pierrette! Jacques is watching over you as in the old days when we slid on the pond and I pulled you out of the hole in which we were nearly drowned together.

Adieu, my dear Pierrette; in a few days, if God wills, we shall be happy. Alas, I dare not tell you the only thing that may hinder our meeting. But God loves us! In a few days I shall see my dear Pierrette at liberty, without troubles, without any one to hinder my looking at you — for, ah! Pierrette, I hunger to see you — Pierrette, Pierrette, who deigns to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be

your lover when I have earned the fortune you deserve; till then I will be to you only a devoted servant whose life is yours to do what you please with it. Adieu.

Jacques Brigaut.

Here is a letter of which the major's son said nothing to Pierrette.

He wrote it to Madame Lorrain at Nantes: —

Madame Lorrain, — Your granddaughter will die, worn-out with ill-treatment, if you do not come to fetch her. I could scarcely recognize her; and to show you the state of things I enclose a letter I have received from Pierrette. You are thought here to have taken the money of your granddaughter, and you ought to justify yourself. If you can, come at once. We may still be happy; but if delay Pierrette will be dead.

I am, with respect, your devoted servant,

Jacques Brigaut.

At Monsieur Frappier's, Cabinet-maker, Grand'Rue, Provins. Brigaut's fear was that the grandmother was dead.

Though this letter of the youth whom in her innocence she called her lover was almost enigmatical to Pierrette, she believed in it with all her virgin faith. Her heart was filled with that sensation which travellers in the desert feel when they see from afar the palm-trees round a well. In a few days her misery would end — Jacques said so. She relied on this promise of her childhood's friend; and yet, as she laid the letter beside the other, a dreadful thought came to her in foreboding words.

"Poor Jacques," she said to herself, "he does not know the hole into which I have now fallen!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette, and she had also heard Brigaut under her window. She jumped out of bed and rushed to the window to look through the blinds into the square and there she saw, in the moonlight, a man hurrying in the direction of the colonel's house, in front of which Brigaut happened to stop. The old maid gently opened her door, went upstairs, was amazed to find a light in Pierrette's room, looked through the keyhole, and could see nothing.

"Pierrette," she said, "are you ill?"

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, surprised.

"Why is your candle burning at this time of night? Open the door; I must know what this means."

Pierrette went to the door bare-footed, and as soon as Sylvie entered the room she saw the cord, which Pierrette had forgotten to put away, not dreaming of a surprise. Sylvie jumped upon it.

"What is that for?" she asked.

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing!" she cried. "Always lying; you'll never get to heaven that way. Go to bed; you'll take cold."

She asked no more questions and went away, leaving Pierrette terrified by her unusual clemency. Instead of exploding with rage, Sylvie had suddenly determined to surprise Pierrette and the colonel together, to seize their letters and confound the two lovers who were deceiving her. Pierrette, inspired by a sense of

danger, sewed the letters into her corset and covered them with calico.

Here end the loves of Pierrette and Brigaut.

Pierrette rejoiced in the thought that Jacques had determined to hold no communication with her for some days, because her cousin's suspicions would be quieted by finding nothing to feed them. Sylvie did in fact spend the next three nights on her legs, and each evening in watching the innocent colonel, without discovering either in him or in Pierrette, or in the house or out of it, anything that betrayed their understanding. She sent Pierrette to confession, and seized that moment to search the child's room, with the method and penetration of a spy or a custom-house officer. She found nothing. Her fury reached the apogee of human sentiments. If Pierrette had been there she would certainly have struck her remorselessly. To a woman of her temper, jealousy was less a sentiment than an occupation; she existed in it, it made her heart beat, she felt emotions hitherto completely unknown to her; the slightest sound or movement kept her on the qui vive; she watched Pierrette with gloomy intentness.

"That miserable little wretch will kill me," she said.

Sylvie's severity to her cousin reached the point of refined cruelty, and made the deplorable condition of the poor girl worse daily. She had fever regularly, and the pains in her head became intolerable. By the end of the week even the visitors at the house noticed her suffering face, which would have touched to pity all

selfishness less cruel than theirs. It happened that Doctor Neraud, possibly by Vinet's advice, did not come to the house during that week. The colonel, knowing himself suspected by Sylvie, was afraid to risk his marriage by showing any solicitude for Pierrette. Bathilde explained the visible change in the girl by her natural growth. But at last, one Sunday evening, when Pierrette was in the salon, her sufferings overcame her and she fainted away. The colonel, who first saw her going, caught her in his arms and carried her to a sofa.

"She did it on purpose," said Sylvie, looking at Mademoiselle Habert and the rest who were playing boston with her.

"I assure you that your cousin is very ill," said the colonel.

"She seemed well enough in your arms," Sylvie said to him in a low voice, with a savage smile.

"The colonel is right," said Madame de Chargeboeuf. "You ought to send for a doctor. This morning at church every one was speaking, as they came out, of Mademoiselle Lorrain's appearance."

"I am dying," said Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called to Sylvie and told her to unfasten her cousin's gown. Sylvie went up to the girl, saying, "It is only a tantrum."

She unfastened the gown and was about to touch the corset, when Pierrette, roused by the danger, sat up with superhuman strength, exclaiming, "No, no, I will go to bed."

Sylvie had, however, touched the corset and felt the papers.

She let Pierrette go, saying to the company:

"What do you think now of her illness? I tell you it is all a pretence. You have no idea of the perversity of that child."

After the card-playing was over she kept Vinet from following the other guests; she was furious and wanted vengeance, and was grossly rude to the colonel when he bade her good-night. Gouraud threw a look at the lawyer which threatened him to the depths of his being and seemed to put a ball in his entrails. Sylvie told Vinet to remain. When they were alone, she said, —

"Never in my life, never in my born days, will I marry the colonel."

"Now that you have come to that decision I may speak," said the lawyer. "The colonel is my friend, but I am more yours than his. Rogron has done me services which I can never forget. I am as strong a friend as I am an enemy. Once in the Chamber I shall rise to power, and I will make your brother a receiver-general. Now swear to me, before I say more, that you will never repeat what I tell you." (Sylvie made an affirmative sign.) "In the first place, the brave colonel is a gambler — "

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"If it had not been for the embarrassments this vice has brought upon him, he might have been a marshal of France," continued Vinet. "He is capable of running through your property; but he is very astute; you cannot be sure of not having children, and you told me yourself the risks you feared. No, if you want to marry, wait till I am in the Chamber and then

take that old Desfondrilles, who shall be made chief justice. If you want revenge on the colonel make your brother marry Mademoiselle de Chargeboeuf, – I can get her consent; she has two thousand francs a year, and you will be connected with the de Chargeboeufs as I am. Recollect what I tell you, the Chargeboeufs will be glad to claim us for cousins some day."

"Gouraud loves Pierrette," was Sylvie's only answer.

"He is quite capable of it," said Vinet, "and capable of marrying her after your death."

"A fine calculation!" she said.

"I tell you that man has the shrewdness of the devil. Marry your brother and announce that you mean to remain unmarried and will leave your property to your nephews and nieces. That will strike a blow at Gouraud and Pierrette both! and you'll see the faces they'll make."

"Ah! that's true," cried the old maid, "I can serve them both right. She shall go to a shop, and get nothing from me. She hasn't a sou; let her do as we did, – work."

Vinet departed, having put his plan into Sylvie's head, her dogged obstinacy being well-known to him. The old maid, he was certain, would think the scheme her own, and carry it out.

The lawyer found the colonel in the square, smoking a cigar while he waited for him.

"Halt!" said Gouraud; "you have pulled me down, but stones enough came with me to bury you – "

"Colonel! – "

"Colonel or not, I shall give you your deserts. In the first place, you shall not be deputy – "

"Colonel! – "

"I control ten votes and the election depends on – "

"Colonel, listen to me. Is there no one to marry but that old Sylvie? I have just been defending you to her; you are accused and convicted of writing to Pierrette; she saw you leave your house at midnight and come to the girl's window – "

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"She means to marry her brother to Bathilde and leave her fortune to their children."

"Rogron won't have any."

"Yes he will," replied Vinet. "But I promise to find you some young and agreeable woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs? Don't be a fool; how can you and I afford to quarrel? Things have gone against you in spite of all my care; but you don't understand me."

"Then we must understand each other," said the colonel. "Get me a wife with a hundred and fifty thousand francs before the elections; if not – look out for yourself! I don't like unpleasant bed-fellows, and you've pulled the blankets all over to your side. Good-evening."

"You shall see," said Vinet, grasping the colonel's hand affectionately.

About one o'clock that night three clear, sharp cries of an owl, wonderfully well imitated, echoed through the square. Pierrette heard them in her feverish sleep; she jumped up, moist with perspiration, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and flung down a ball of silk, to which he fastened a letter. Sylvie, agitated by the events of the day and her own indecision of mind, was not asleep; she heard the owl.

"Ah, bird of ill-omen!" she thought. "Why, Pierrette is getting up!"

What is she after?"

Hearing the attic window open softly, Sylvie rushed to her own window and heard the rustle of paper against her blinds. She fastened the strings of her bed-gown and went quickly upstairs to Pierrette's room, where she found the poor girl unwinding the silk and freeing the letter.

"Ha! I've caught you!" cried the old woman, rushing to the window, from which she saw Jacques running at full speed. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said Pierrette, who, by one of those strong inspirations of youth sustained by her own soul, rose to a grandeur of resistance such as we admire in the history of certain peoples reduced to despair.

"Ha! you will not?" cried Sylvie, advancing upon the girl with

a face full of hatred and fury.

Pierrette fell back to get time to put her letter in her hand, which she clenched with unnatural force. Seeing this manoeuvre Sylvie grasped the delicate white hand of the girl in her lobster claws and tried to open it. It was a frightful struggle, an infamous struggle; it was more than a physical struggle; it assailed the mind, the sole treasure of the human being, the thought, which God has placed beyond all earthly power and guards as the secret way between the sufferer and Himself. The two women, one dying, the other in the vigor of health, looked at each other fixedly. Pierrette's eyes darted on her executioner the look the famous Templar on the rack cast upon Philippe le Bel, who could not bear it and fled thunderstricken. Sylvie, a woman and a jealous woman, answered that magnetic look with malignant flashes. A dreadful silence reigned. The clenched hand of the Breton girl resisted her cousin's efforts like a block of steel. Sylvie twisted Pierrette's arm, she tried to force the fingers open; unable to do so she stuck her nails into the flesh. At last, in her madness, she set her teeth into the wrist, trying to conquer the girl by pain. Pierrette defied her still, with that same terrible glance of innocence. The anger of the old maid grew to such a pitch that it became blind fury. She seized Pierrette's arm and struck the closed fist upon the window-sill, and then upon the marble of the mantelpiece, as we crack a nut to get the kernel.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, "they are murdering me!"

"Ha! you may well scream, when I catch you with a lover in

the dead of night."

And she beat the hand pitilessly.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, the blood flowing.

At that instant, loud knocks were heard at the front door. Exhausted, the two women paused a moment.

Rogron, awakened and uneasy, not knowing what was happening, had got up, gone to his sister's room, and not finding her was frightened. Hearing the knocks he went down, unfastened the front door, and was nearly knocked over by Brigaut, followed by a sort of phantom.

At this moment Sylvie's eyes chanced to fall on Pierrette's corset, and she remembered the papers. Releasing the girl's wrist she sprang upon the corset like a tiger on its prey, and showed it to Pierrette with a smile, – the smile of an Iroquois over his victim before he scalps him.

"I am dying," said Pierrette, falling on her knees, "oh, who will save me?"

"I!" said a woman with white hair and an aged parchment face, in which two gray eyes glittered.

"Ah! grandmother, you have come too late," cried the poor child, bursting into tears.

Pierrette fell upon her bed, her strength all gone, half-dead with the exhaustion which, in her feeble state, followed so violent a struggle. The tall gray woman took her in her arms, as a nurse lifts a child, and went out, followed by Brigaut, without a word to Sylvie, on whom she cast one glance of majestic accusation.

The apparition of that august old woman, in her Breton costume, shrouded in her coif (a sort of hooded mantle of black cloth), accompanied by Brigaut, appalled Sylvie; she fancied she saw death. She slowly went down the stairs, listened to the front door closing behind them, and came face to face with her brother, who exclaimed: "Then they haven't killed you?"

"Go to bed," said Sylvie. "To-morrow we will see what we must do."

She went back to her own bed, ripped open the corset, and read Brigaut's two letters, which confounded her. She went to sleep in the greatest perplexity, – not imagining the terrible results to which her conduct was to lead.

* * * * *

The letters sent by Brigaut to old Madame Lorrain reached her in a moment of ineffable joy, which the perusal of them troubled. The poor old woman had grieved deeply in living without her Pierrette beside her, but she had consoled her loneliness with the thought that the sacrifice of herself was in the interests of her grandchild. She was blessed with one of those ever-young hearts which are upheld and invigorated by the idea of sacrifice. Her old husband, whose only joy was his little granddaughter, had grieved for Pierrette; every day he had seemed to look for her. It was an old man's grief, – on which such old men live, of which they die.

Every one can now imagine the happiness which this poor old woman, living in a sort of almshouse, felt when she learned of a generous action, rare indeed but not impossible in France. The head of the house of Collinet, whose failure in 1814 had caused the Lorrains a loss of twenty-four thousand francs, had gone to America with his children after his disasters. He had too high a courage to remain a ruined man. After eleven years of untold effort crowned by success he returned to Nantes to recover his position, leaving his eldest son in charge of his transatlantic house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoel in the institution of Saint-Jacques, and was witness of the resignation with which this most unfortunate of his creditors bore her misery.

"God forgive you!" said the old woman, "since you give me on the borders of my grave the means of securing the happiness of my dear granddaughter; but alas! it will not clear the debts of my poor husband!"

Monsieur Collinet made over to the widow both the capital and the accrued interest, amounting to about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, prosperous, rich, and intelligent merchants, had easily born their losses, whereas the misfortunes of the Lorrains seemed so irremediable to old Monsieur Collinet that he promised the widow to pay off her husband's debts, to the amount of forty thousand francs more. When the Bourse of Nantes heard of this generous reparation they wished to receive Collinet to their board before his certificates were granted by the Royal court at Rennes; but the merchant refused the honor,

preferring to submit to the ordinary commercial rule.

Madame Lorrain had received the money only the day before the post brought her Brigaut's letter, enclosing that of Pierrette. Her first thought had been, as she signed the receipt: "Now I can live with my Pierrette and marry her to that good Brigaut, who will make a fortune with my money."

Therefore the moment she had read the fatal letters she made instant preparations to start for Provins. She left Nantes that night by the mail; for some one had explained to her its celerity. In Paris she took the diligence for Troyes, which passes through Provins, and by half-past eleven at night she reached Frappier's, where Brigaut, shocked at her despairing looks, told her of Pierrette's state and promised to bring the poor girl to her instantly. His words so terrified the grandmother that she could not control her impatience and followed him to the square. When Pierrette screamed, the horror of that cry went to her heart as sharply as it did to Brigaut's. Together they would have roused the neighborhood if Rogron, in his terror, had not opened the door. The scream of the young girl at bay gave her grandmother the sudden strength of anger with which she carried her dear Pierrette in her arms to Frappier's house, where Madame Frappier hastily arranged Brigaut's own room for the old woman and her treasure. In that poor room, on a bed half-made, the sufferer was deposited; and there she fainted away, holding her hand still clenched, wounded, bleeding, with the nails deep bedded in the flesh. Brigaut, Frappier, his wife, and the old

woman stood looking at Pierrette in silence, all four of them in a state of indescribable amazement.

"Why is her hand bloody?" said the grandmother at last.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep which follows all abnormal displays of strength, and dimly conscious that she was safe from violence, gradually unbent her fingers. Brigaut's letter fell from them like an answer.

"They tried to take my letter from her," said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the lines in which he had told his little friend to come instantly and softly away from the house. He kissed with pious love the martyr's hand.

It was a sight that made those present tremble when they saw the old gray woman, a sublime spectre, standing beside her grandchild's pillow. Terror and vengeance wrote their fierce expressions in the wrinkles that lined her skin of yellow ivory; her forehead, half hidden by the straggling meshes of her gray hair, expressed a solemn anger. She read, with a power of intuition given to the aged when near their grave, Pierrette's whole life, on which her mind had dwelt throughout her journey. She divined the illness of her darling, and knew that she was threatened with death. Two big tears painfully rose in her wan gray eyes, from which her troubles had worn both lashes and eyebrows, two pearls of anguish, forming within them and giving them a dreadful brightness; then each tear swelled and rolled down the withered cheek, but did not wet it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.