HONORÉ DE BALZAC

PETTY TROUBLES OF MARRIED LIFE, SECOND PART

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Содержание

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PREFACE

If, reader, you have grasped the intent of this book, – and infinite honor is done you by the supposition: the profoundest author does not always comprehend, I may say never comprehends, the different meanings of his book, nor its bearing, nor the good nor the harm it may do – if, then, you have bestowed some attention upon these little scenes of married life, you have perhaps noticed their color —

"What color?" some grocer will doubtless ask; "books are bound in yellow, blue, green, pearl-gray, white – "

Alas! books possess another color, they are dyed by the author, and certain writers borrow their dye. Some books let their color come off on to others. More than this. Books are dark or fair, light brown or red. They have a sex, too! I know of male books, and female books, of books which, sad to say, have no sex, which we hope is not the case with this one, supposing that you do this collection of nosographic sketches the honor of calling it a book.

Thus far, the troubles we have described have been exclusively inflicted by the wife upon the husband. You have therefore seen only the masculine side of the book. And if the author really has the sense of hearing for which we give him credit, he has already caught more than one indignant exclamation or remonstrance:

"He tells us of nothing but vexations suffered by our husbands, as if we didn't have our petty troubles, too!"

Oh, women! You have been heard, for if you do not always make yourselves understood, you are always sure to make yourselves heard.

It would therefore be signally unjust to lay upon you alone the reproaches that every being brought under the yoke (*conjugium*) has the right to heap upon that necessary, sacred, useful, eminently conservative institution, – one, however, that is often somewhat of an encumbrance, and tight about the joints, though sometimes it is also too loose there.

I will go further! Such partiality would be a piece of idiocy.

A man, – not a writer, for in a writer there are many men, – an author, rather, should resemble Janus, see behind and before, become a spy, examine an idea in all its phases, delve alternately into the soul of Alceste and into that of Philaenete, know everything though he does not tell it, never be tiresome, and —

We will not conclude this programme, for we should tell the whole, and that would be frightful for those who reflect upon the present condition of literature.

Furthermore, an author who speaks for himself in the middle

of his book, resembles the old fellow in "The Speaking Picture," when he puts his face in the hole cut in the painting. The author does not forget that in the Chamber, no one can take the floor *between two votes*. Enough, therefore!

Here follows the female portion of the book: for, to resemble marriage perfectly, it ought to be more or less hermaphroditic.

PETTY TROUBLES OF MARRIED LIFE

HUSBANDS DURING THE SECOND MONTH

Two young married women, Caroline and Stephanie, who had been early friends at M'lle Machefer's boarding school, one of the most celebrated educational institutions in the Faubourg St. Honore, met at a ball given by Madame de Fischtaminel, and the following conversation took place in a window-seat in the boudoir.

It was so hot that a man had acted upon the idea of going to breathe the fresh night air, some time before the two young women. He had placed himself in the angle of the balcony, and, as there were many flowers before the window, the two friends thought themselves alone. This man was the author's best friend.

One of the two ladies, standing at the corner of the embrasure, kept watch by looking at the boudoir and the parlors. The other had so placed herself as not to be in the draft, which was nevertheless tempered by the muslin and silk curtains.

The boudoir was empty, the ball was just beginning, the gaming-tables were open, offering their green cloths and their

packs of cards still compressed in the frail case placed upon them by the customs office. The second quadrille was in progress.

All who go to balls will remember that phase of large parties when the guests are not yet all arrived, but when the rooms are already filled – a moment which gives the mistress of the house a transitory pang of terror. This moment is, other points of comparison apart, like that which decides a victory or the loss of a battle.

You will understand, therefore, how what was meant to be a secret now obtains the honors of publicity.

"Well, Caroline?"

"Well, Stephanie?"

"Well?"

"Well?"

A double sigh.

"Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No."

"Why haven't you been to see me, then?"

"I am never left alone. Even here we shall hardly have time to talk."

"Ah! if Adolphe were to get into such habits as that!" exclaimed Caroline.

"You saw us, Armand and me, when he paid me what is called, I don't know why, his court."

"Yes, I admired him, I thought you very happy, you had found your ideal, a fine, good-sized man, always well dressed, with

yellow gloves, his beard well shaven, patent leather boots, a clean shirt, exquisitely neat, and so attentive – "

"Yes, yes, go on."

"In short, quite an elegant man: his voice was femininely sweet, and then such gentleness! And his promises of happiness and liberty! His sentences were veneered with rosewood. He stocked his conversation with shawls and laces. In his smallest expression you heard the rumbling of a coach and four. Your wedding presents were magnificent. Armand seemed to me like a husband of velvet, of a robe of birds' feathers in which you were to be wrapped."

"Caroline, my husband uses tobacco."

"So does mine; that is, he smokes."

"But mine, dear, uses it as they say Napoleon did: in short, he chews, and I hold tobacco in horror. The monster found it out, and went without out it for seven months."

"All men have their habits. They absolutely must use something."

"You have no idea of the tortures I endure. At night I am awakened with a start by one of my own sneezes. As I go to sleep my motions bring the grains of snuff scattered over the pillow under my nose, I inhale, and explode like a mine. It seems that Armand, the wretch, is used to these *surprises*, and doesn't wake up. I find tobacco everywhere, and I certainly didn't marry the customs office."

"But, my dear child, what does this trifling inconvenience

amount to, if your husband is kind and possesses a good disposition?"

"He is as cold as marble, as particular as an old bachelor, as communicative as a sentinel; and he's one of those men who say yes to everything, but who never do anything but what they want to."

"Deny him, once."

"I've tried it."

"What came of it?"

"He threatened to reduce my allowance, and to keep back a sum big enough for him to get along without me."

"Poor Stephanie! He's not a man, he's a monster."

"A calm and methodical monster, who wears a scratch, and who, every night – "

"Well, every night – "

"Wait a minute! – who takes a tumbler every night, and puts seven false teeth in it."

"What a trap your marriage was! At any rate, Armand is rich."

"Who knows?"

"Good heavens! Why, you seem to me on the point of becoming very unhappy – or very happy."

"Well, dear, how is it with you?"

"Oh, as for me, I have nothing as yet but a pin that pricks me: but it is intolerable."

"Poor creature! You don't know your own happiness: come, what is it?"

Here the young woman whispered in the other's ear, so that it was impossible to catch a single word. The conversation recommenced, or rather finished by a sort of inference.

"So, your Adolphe is jealous?"

"Jealous of whom? We never leave each other, and that, in itself, is an annoyance. I can't stand it. I don't dare to gape. I am expected to be forever enacting the woman in love. It's fatiguing."

"Caroline?"

"Well?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Resign myself. What are you?

"Fight the customs office."

This little trouble tends to prove that in the matter of personal deception, the two sexes can well cry quits.

DISAPPOINTED AMBITION

I. CHODOREILLE THE GREAT

A young man has forsaken his natal city in the depths of one of the departments, rather clearly marked by M. Charles Dupin. He felt that glory of some sort awaited him: suppose that of a painter, a novelist, a journalist, a poet, a great statesman.

Young Adolphe de Chodoreille – that we may be perfectly understood – wished to be talked about, to become celebrated, to be somebody. This, therefore, is addressed to the mass of aspiring individuals brought to Paris by all sorts of vehicles, whether moral or material, and who rush upon the city one fine morning with the hydrophobic purpose of overturning everybody's reputation, and of building themselves a pedestal with the ruins they are to make, – until disenchantment follows. As our intention is to specify this peculiarity so characteristic of our epoch, let us take from among the various personages the one whom the author has elsewhere called *A Distinguished Provencal*.

Adolphe has discovered that the most admirable trade is that which consists in buying a bottle of ink, a bunch of quills, and a ream of paper, at a stationer's for twelve francs and a half, and in selling the two thousand sheets in the ream over again, for something like fifty thousand francs, after having, of

course, written upon each leaf fifty lines replete with style and imagination.

This problem, – twelve francs and a half metamorphosed into fifty thousand francs, at the rate of five sous a line – urges numerous families who might advantageously employ their members in the retirement of the provinces, to thrust them into the vortex of Paris.

The young man who is the object of this exportation, invariably passes in his natal town for a man of as much imagination as the most famous author. He has always studied well, he writes very nice poetry, he is considered a fellow of parts: he is besides often guilty of a charming tale published in the local paper, which obtains the admiration of the department.

His poor parents will never know what their son has come to Paris to learn at great cost, namely: That it is difficult to be a writer and to understand the French language short of a dozen years of heculean labor: That a man must have explored every sphere of social life, to become a genuine novelist, inasmuch as the novel is the private history of nations: That the great story-tellers, Aesop, Lucian, Boccaccio, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, La Fontaine, Lesage, Sterne, Voltaire, Walter Scott, the unknown Arabians of the *Thousand and One Nights*, were all men of genius as well as giants of erudition.

Their Adolphe serves his literary apprenticeship in two or three coffee-houses, becomes a member of the Society of Men of Letters, attacks, with or without reason, men of talent

who don't read his articles, assumes a milder tone on seeing the powerlessness of his criticisms, offers novelettes to the papers which toss them from one to the other as if they were shuttlecocks: and, after five or six years of exercises more or less fatiguing, of dreadful privations which seriously tax his parents, he attains a certain position.

This position may be described as follows: Thanks to a sort of reciprocal support extended to each other, and which an ingenious writer has called "Mutual Admiration," Adolphe often sees his name cited among the names of celebrities, either in the prospectuses of the book-trade, or in the lists of newspapers about to appear. Publishers print the title of one of his works under the deceitful heading "IN PRESS," which might be called the typographical menagerie of bears.[1] Chodoreille is sometimes mentioned among the promising young men of the literary world.

For eleven years Adolphe Chodoreille remains in the ranks of the promising young men: he finally obtains a free entrance to the theatres, thanks to some dirty work or certain articles of dramatic criticism: he tries to pass for a good fellow; and as he loses his illusions respecting glory and the world of Paris, he gets into debt and his years begin to tell upon him.

A paper which finds itself in a tight place asks him for one of his bears revised by his friends. This has been retouched and

[1] A bear (*ours*) is a play which has been refused by a multitude of theatres, but which is finally represented at a time when some manager or other feels the need of one. The word has necessarily passed from the language of the stage into the jargon of journalism, and is applied to novels which wander the streets in search of a publisher.

revamped every five years, so that it smells of the pomatum of each prevailing and then forgotten fashion. To Adolphe it becomes what the famous cap, which he was constantly staking, was to Corporal Trim, for during five years "Anything for a Woman" (the title decided upon) "will be one of the most entertaining productions of our epoch."

After eleven years, Chodoreille is regarded as having written some respectable things, five or six tales published in the dismal magazines, in ladies' newspapers, or in works intended for children of tender age.

As he is a bachelor, and possesses a coat and a pair of black cassimere trousers, and when he pleases may thus assume the appearance of an elegant diplomat, and as he is not without a certain intelligent air, he is admitted to several more or less literary salons: he bows to the five or six academicians who possess genius, influence or talent, he visits two or three of our great poets, he allows himself, in coffee-rooms, to call the two or three justly celebrated women of our epoch by their Christian names; he is on the best of terms with the blue stockings of the second grade, – who ought to be called *socks*, – and he shakes hands and takes glasses of absinthe with the stars of the smaller newspapers.

Such is the history of every species of ordinary men – men who have been denied what they call good luck. This good luck is nothing less than unyielding will, incessant labor, contempt for an easily won celebrity, immense learning, and that patience

which, according to Buffon, is the whole of genius, but which certainly is the half of it.

You do not yet see any indication of a petty trouble for Caroline. You imagine that this history of five hundred young men engaged at this moment in wearing smooth the paving stones of Paris, was written as a sort of warning to the families of the eighty-six departments of France: but read these two letters which lately passed between two girls differently married, and you will see that it was as necessary as the narrative by which every true melodrama was until lately expected to open. You will divine the skillful manoeuvres of the Parisian peacock spreading his tail in the recesses of his native village, and polishing up, for matrimonial purposes, the rays of his glory, which, like those of the sun, are only warm and brilliant at a distance.

From Madame Claire de la Roulandiere, nee Jugault, to Madame Adolphe de Chodoreille, nee Heurtaut.

"VIVIERS

"You have not yet written to me, and it's real unkind in you. Don't you remember that the happier was to write first and to console her who remained in the country?

"Since your departure for Paris, I have married Monsieur de la Roulandiere, the president of the tribunal. You know him, and you can judge whether I am happy or not, with my heart *saturated*, as it is, with our ideas. I was not ignorant what my lot

would be: I live with the ex-president, my husband's uncle, and with my mother-in-law, who has preserved nothing of the ancient parliamentary society of Aix but its pride and its severity of manners. I am seldom alone, I never go out unless accompanied by my mother-in-law or my husband. We receive the heavy people of the city in the evening. They play whist at two sous a point, and I listen to conversations of this nature:

"'Monsieur Vitremont is dead, and leaves two hundred and eighty thousand francs,' says the associate judge, a young man of forty-seven, who is as entertaining as a northwest wind.

"'Are you quite sure of that?'

"The *that* refers to the two hundred and eighty thousand francs. A little judge then holds forth, he runs over the investments, the others discuss their value, and it is definitely settled that if he has not left two hundred and eighty thousand, he left something near it.

"Then comes a universal concert of eulogy heaped upon the dead man's body, for having kept his bread under lock and key, for having shrewdly invested his little savings accumulated sou by sou, in order, probably, that the whole city and those who expect legacies may applaud and exclaim in admiration, 'He leaves two hundred and eighty thousand francs!' Now everybody has rich relations of whom they say 'Will he leave anything like it?' and thus they discuss the quick as they have discussed the dead.

"They talk of nothing but the prospects of fortune, the prospects of a vacancy in office, the prospects of the harvest.

"When we were children, and used to look at those pretty little white mice, in the cobbler's window in the rue St. Maclou, that turned and turned the circular cage in which they were imprisoned, how far I was from thinking that they would one day be a faithful image of my life!

"Think of it, my being in this condition! – I who fluttered my wings so much more than you, I whose imagination was so vagabond! My sins have been greater than yours, and I am the more severely punished. I have bidden farewell to my dreams: I am *Madame la Presidente* in all my glory, and I resign myself to giving my arm for forty years to my big awkward Roulandiere, to living meanly in every way, and to having forever before me two heavy brows and two wall-eyes pierced in a yellow face, which is destined never to know what it is to smile.

"But you, Caroline dear, you who, between ourselves, were admitted among the big girls while I still gamboled among the little ones, you whose only sin was pride, you, – at the age of twenty-seven, and with a dowry of two hundred thousand francs, – capture and captivate a truly great man, one of the wittiest men in Paris, one of the two talented men that our village has produced. – What luck!

"You now circulate in the most brilliant society of Paris. Thanks to the sublime privileges of genius. You may appear in all the salons of the Faubourg St. Germain, and be cordially received. You have the exquisite enjoyment of the company of the two or three celebrated women of our age, where so many

good things are said, where the happy speeches which arrive out here like Congreve rockets, are first fired off. You go to the Baron Schinner's of whom Adolphe so often spoke to us, whom all the great artists and foreigners of celebrity visit. In short, before long, you will be one of the queens of Paris, if you wish. You can receive, too, and have at your house the lions of literature, fashion and finance, whether male or female, for Adolphe spoke in such terms about his illustrious friendships and his intimacy with the favorites of the hour, that I imagine you giving and receiving honors.

"With your ten thousand francs a year, and the legacy from your Aunt Carabas, added to the twenty thousand francs that your husband earns, you must keep a carriage; and since you go to all the theatres without paying, since journalists are the heroes of all the inaugurations so ruinous for those who keep up with the movement of Paris, and since they are constantly invited to dinner, you live as if you had an income of sixty thousand francs a year! Happy Caroline! I don't wonder you forget me!

"I can understand how it is that you have not a moment to yourself. Your bliss is the cause of your silence, so I pardon you. Still, if, fatigued with so many pleasures, you one day, upon the summit of your grandeur, think of your poor Claire, write to me, tell me what a marriage with a great man is, describe those great Parisian ladies, especially those who write. Oh! I should *so* much like to know what they are made of! Finally don't forget anything, unless you forget that you are loved, as ever, by your poor

"CLAIRE JUGAULT."

From Madame Adolphe de Chodoreille to Madame la Presidente de la Roulandiere, at Viviers.

"PARIS

"Ah! my poor Claire, could you have known how many wretched little griefs your innocent letter would awaken, you never would have written it. Certainly no friend, and not even an enemy, on seeing a woman with a thousand mosquito-bites and a plaster over them, would amuse herself by tearing it off and counting the stings.

"I will begin by telling you that for a woman of twenty-seven, with a face still passable, but with a form a little too much like that of the Emperor Nicholas for the humble part I play, I am happy! Let me tell you why: Adolphe, rejoicing in the deceptions which have fallen upon me like a hail-storm, smoothes over the wounds in my self-love by so much affection, so many attentions, and such charming things, that, in good truth, women – so far as they are simply women – would be glad to find in the man they marry defects so advantageous. But all men of letters (Adolphe, alas! is barely a man of letters), who are beings not a bit less irritable, nervous, fickle and eccentric than women, are far from

possessing such solid qualities as those of Adolphe, and I hope they have not all been as unfortunate as he.

"Ah! Claire, we love each other well enough for me to tell you the simple truth. I have saved my husband, dear, from profound but skillfully concealed poverty. Far from receiving twenty thousand francs a year, he has not earned that sum in the entire fifteen years that he has been at Paris. We occupy a third story in the rue Joubert, and pay twelve hundred francs for it; we have some eighty-five hundred francs left, with which I endeavor to keep house honorably.

"I have brought Adolphe luck; for since our marriage, he has obtained the control of a feuilleton which is worth four hundred francs a month to him, though it takes but a small portion of his time. He owes this situation to an investment. We employed the seventy thousand francs left me by my Aunt Carabas in giving security for a newspaper; on this we get nine per cent, and we have stock besides. Since this transaction, which was concluded some ten months ago, our income has doubled, and we now possess a competence, I can complain of my marriage in a pecuniary point of view no more than as regards my affections. My vanity alone has suffered, and my ambition has been swamped. You will understand the various petty troubles which have assailed me, by a single specimen.

"Adolphe, you remember, appeared to us on intimate terms with the famous Baroness Schinner, so renowned for her wit, her influence, her wealth and her connection with celebrated men.

I supposed that he was welcomed at her house as a friend: my husband presented me, and I was coldly received. I saw that her rooms were furnished with extravagant luxury; and instead of Madame Schinner's returning my call, I received a card, twenty days afterward, and at an insolently improper hour.

"On arriving at Paris, I went to walk upon the boulevard, proud of my anonymous great man. He nudged me with his elbow, and said, pointing out a fat little ill-dressed man, 'There's so and so!' He mentioned one of the seven or eight illustrious men in France. I got ready my look of admiration, and I saw Adolphe rapturously doffing his hat to the truly great man, who replied by the curt little nod that you vouchsafe a person with whom you have doubtless exchanged hardly four words in ten years. Adolphe had begged a look for my sake. 'Doesn't he know you?' I said to my husband. 'Oh, yes, but he probably took me for somebody else,' replied he.

"And so of poets, so of celebrated musicians, so of statesmen. But, as a compensation, we stop and talk for ten minutes in front of some arcade or other, with Messieurs Armand du Cantal, George Beaunoir, Felix Verdoret, of whom you have never heard. Mesdames Constantine Ramachard, Anais Crottat, and Lucienne Vouillon threaten me with their *blue* friendship. We dine editors totally unknown in our province. Finally I have had the painful happiness of seeing Adolphe decline an invitation to an evening party to which I was not bidden.

"Oh! Claire dear, talent is still the rare flower of spontaneous growth, that no greenhouse culture can produce. I do not deceive

myself: Adolphe is an ordinary man, known, estimated as such: he has no other chance, as he himself says, than to take his place among the *utilities* of literature. He was not without wit at Viviers: but to be a man of wit at Paris, you must possess every kind of wit in formidable doses.

"I esteem Adolphe: for, after some few fibs, he frankly confessed his position, and, without humiliating himself too deeply, he promised that I should be happy. He hopes, like numerous other ordinary men, to obtain some place, that of an assistant librarian, for instance, or the pecuniary management of a newspaper. Who knows but we may get him elected deputy for Viviers, in the course of time?

"We live in obscurity; we have five or six friends of either sex whom we like, and such is the brilliant style of life which your letter gilded with all the social splendors.

"From time to time I am caught in a squall, or am the butt of some malicious tongue. Thus, yesterday, at the opera, I heard one of our most ill-natured wits, Leon de Lora, say to one of our most famous critics, 'It takes Chodoreille to discover the Caroline poplar on the banks of the Rhone!' They had heard my husband call me by my Christian name. At Viviers I was considered handsome. I am tall, well made, and fat enough to satisfy Adolphe! In this way I learn that the beauty of women from the country is, at Paris, precisely like the wit of country gentleman.

"In short, I am absolutely nobody, if that is what you wish to

know: but if you desire to learn how far my philosophy goes, understand that I am really happy in having found an ordinary man in my pretended great one.

"Farewell, dear Claire! It is still I, you see, who, in spite of my delusions and the petty troubles of my life, am the most favorably situated: for Adolphe is young, and a charming fellow.

"CAROLINE HEURTAUT."

Claire's reply contained, among other passages, the following: "I hope that the indescribable happiness which you enjoy, will continue, thanks to your philosophy." Claire, as any intimate female friend would have done, consoled herself for her president by insinuations respecting Adolphe's prospects and future conduct.

II. ANOTHER GLANCE AT CHODOREILLE

(Letter discovered one day in a casket, while she was making me wait a long time and trying to get rid of a hanger-on who could not be made to understand hidden meanings. I caught cold – but I got hold of this letter.)

This fatuous note was found on a paper which the notary's clerks had thought of no importance in the inventory of the estate of M. Ferdinand de Bourgarel, who was mourned of late

by politics, arts and amours, and in whom is ended the great Provencal house of Borgarelli; for as is generally known the name Bourgarel is a corruption of Borgarelli just as the French Girardin is the Florentine Gherardini.

An intelligent reader will find little difficulty in placing this letter in its proper epoch in the lives of Adolphe and Caroline.

"My dear Friend:

"I thought myself lucky indeed to marry an artist as superior in his talent as in his personal attributes, equally great in soul and mind, worldly-wise, and likely to rise by following the public road without being obliged to wander along crooked, doubtful by-paths. However, you knew Adolphe; you appreciated his worth. I am loved, he is a father, I idolize our children. Adolphe is kindness itself to me; I admire and love him. But, my dear, in this complete happiness lurks a thorn. The roses upon which I recline have more than one fold. In the heart of a woman, folds speedily turn to wounds. These wounds soon bleed, the evil spreads, we suffer, the suffering awakens thoughts, the thoughts swell and change the course of sentiment.

"Ah, my dear, you shall know all about it, though it is a cruel thing to say – but we live as much by vanity as by love. To live by love alone, one must dwell somewhere else than in Paris. What difference would it make to us whether we had only one white percale gown, if the man we love did not see other women dressed differently, more elegantly than we – women who inspire ideas by their ways, by a multitude of little things which really go

to make up great passions? Vanity, my dear, is cousin-german to jealousy, to that beautiful and noble jealousy which consists in not allowing one's empire to be invaded, in reigning undisturbed in a soul, and passing one's life happily in a heart.

"Ah, well, my woman's vanity is on the rack. Though some troubles may seem petty indeed, I have learned, unfortunately, that in the home there are no petty troubles. For everything there is magnified by incessant contact with sensations, with desires, with ideas. Such then is the secret of that sadness which you have surprised in me and which I did not care to explain. It is one of those things in which words go too far, and where writing holds at least the thought within bounds by establishing it. The effects of a moral perspective differ so radically between what is said and what is written! All is so solemn, so serious on paper! One cannot commit any more imprudences. Is it not this fact which makes a treasure out of a letter where one gives one's self over to one's thoughts?

"You doubtless thought me wretched, but I am only wounded. You discovered me sitting alone by the fire, and no Adolphe. I had just finished putting the children to bed; they were asleep. Adolphe for the tenth time had been invited out to a house where I do not go, where they want Adolphe without his wife. There are drawing-rooms where he goes without me, just at there are many pleasures in which he alone is the guest. If he were M. de Navarreins and I a d'Espard, society would never think of separating us; it would want us always together. His habits are

formed; he does not suspect the humiliation which weighs upon my heart. Indeed, if he had the slightest inkling of this small sorrow which I am ashamed to own, he would drop society, he would become more of a prig than the people who come between us. But he would hamper his progress, he would make enemies, he would raise up obstacles by imposing me upon the salons where I would be subject to a thousand slights. That is why I prefer my sufferings to what would happen were they discovered.

"Adolphe will succeed! He carries my revenge in his beautiful head, does this man of genius. One day the world shall pay for all these slights. But when? Perhaps I shall be forty-five. My beautiful youth will have passed in my chimney-corner, and with this thought: Adolphe smiles, he is enjoying the society of fair women, he is playing the devoted to them, while none of these attentions come my way.

"It may be that these will finally take him from me!

"No one undergoes slight without feeling it, and I feel that I am slighted, though young, beautiful and virtuous. Now, can I keep from thinking this way? Can I control my anger at the thought that Adolphe is dining in the city without me? I take no part in his triumphs; I do not hear the witty or profound remarks made to others! I could no longer be content with bourgeois receptions whence he rescued me, upon finding me *distinguee*, wealthy, young, beautiful and witty. There lies the evil, and it is irremediable.

"In a word, for some cause, it is only since I cannot go

to a certain salon that I want to go there. Nothing is more natural of the ways of a human heart. The ancients were wise in having their *gyneceums*. The collisions between the pride of the women, caused by these gatherings, though it dates back only four centuries, has cost our own day much disaffection and numerous bitter debates.

"Be that as it may, my dear, Adolphe is always warmly welcomed when he comes back home. Still, no nature is strong enough to await always with the same ardor. What a morrow that will be, following the evening when his welcome is less warm!

"Now do you see the depth of the fold which I mentioned? A fold in the heart is an abyss, like a crevasse in the Alps – a profundity whose depth and extent we have never been able to calculate. Thus it is between two beings, no matter how near they may be drawn to each other. One never realizes the weight of suffering which oppresses his friend. This seems such a little thing, yet one's life is affected by it in all its length, in all its breadth. I have thus argued with myself; but the more I have argued, the more thoroughly have I realized the extent of this hidden sorrow. And I can only let the current carry me whither it will.

"Two voices struggle for supremacy when – by a rarely fortunate chance – I am alone in my armchair waiting for Adolphe. One, I would wager, comes from Eugene Delacroix's *Faust* which I have on my table. Mephistopheles speaks, that terrible aide who guides the swords so dexterously. He leaves the

engraving, and places himself diabolically before me, grinning through the hole which the great artist has placed under his nose, and gazing at me with that eye whence fall rubies, diamonds, carriages, jewels, laces, silks, and a thousand luxuries to feed the burning desire within me.

"'Are you not fit for society?' he asks. 'You are the equal of the fairest duchesses. Your voice is like a siren's, your hands command respect and love. Ah! that arm! – place bracelets upon it, and how pleasingly it would rest upon the velvet of a robe! Your locks are chains which would fetter all men. And you could lay all your triumphs at Adolphe's feet, show him your power and never use it. Then he would fear, where now he lives in insolent certainty. Come! To action! Inhale a few mouthfuls of disdain and you will exhale clouds of incense. Dare to reign! Are you not next to nothing here in your chimney-corner? Sooner or later the pretty spouse, the beloved wife will die, if you continue like this, in a dressing-gown. Come, and you shall perpetuate your sway through the arts of coquetry! Show yourself in salons, and your pretty foot shall trample down the love of your rivals.'

"The other voice comes from my white marble mantel, which rustles like a garment. I think I see a veritable goddess crowned with white roses, and bearing a palm-branch in her hand. Two blue eyes smile down on me. This simple image of virtue says to me:

"'Be content! Remain good always, and make this man happy. That is the whole of your mission. The sweetness of angels

triumphs over all pain. Faith in themselves has enabled the martyrs to obtain solace even on the brasiers of their tormentors. Suffer a moment; you shall be happy in the end.'

"Sometimes Adolphe enters at that moment and I am content. But, my dear, I have less patience than love. I almost wish to tear in pieces the woman who can go everywhere, and whose society is sought out by men and women alike. What profound thought lies in the line of Moliere:

"'The world, dear Agnes, is a curious thing!'

"You know nothing of this petty trouble, you fortunate Mathilde! You are well born. You can do a great deal for me. Just think! I can write you things that I dared not speak about. Your visits mean so much; come often to see your poor

"Caroline."

"Well," said I to the notary's clerk, "do you know what was the nature of this letter to the late Bourgarel?"

"No."

"A note of exchange."

Neither clerk nor notary understood my meaning. Do you?

THE PANGS OF INNOCENCE

"Yes, dear, in the married state, many things will happen to you which you are far from expecting: but then others will happen which you expect still less. For instance – "

The author (may we say the ingenious author?) *qui castigat ridendo mores*, and who has undertaken the *Petty Troubles of Married Life*, hardly needs to remark, that, for prudence' sake, he here allows a lady of high distinction to speak, and that he does not assume the responsibility of her language, though he professes the most sincere admiration for the charming person to whom he owes his acquaintance with this petty trouble.

"For instance – " she says.

He nevertheless thinks proper to avow that this person is neither Madame Foullepointe, nor Madame de Fischtaminel, nor Madame Deschars.

Madame Deschars is too prudish, Madame Foullepointe too absolute in her household, and she knows it; indeed, what doesn't she know? She is good-natured, she sees good society, she wishes to have the best: people overlook the vivacity of her witticisms, as, under louis XIV, they overlooked the remarks of Madame Cornuel. They overlook a good many things in her; there are some women who are the spoiled children of public opinion.

As to Madame de Fischtaminel, who is, in fact, connected with the affair, as you shall see, she, being unable to recriminate,

abstains from words and recriminates in acts.

We give permission to all to think that the speaker is Caroline herself, not the silly little Caroline of tender years. But Caroline when she has become a woman of thirty.

"For instance," she remarks to a young woman whom she is edifying, "you will have children, God willing."

"Madame," I say, "don't let us mix the deity up in this, unless it is an allusion – "

"You are impertinent," she replies, "you shouldn't interrupt a woman – "

"When she is busy with children, I know: but, madame, you ought not to trifle with the innocence of young ladies. Mademoiselle is going to be married, and if she were led to count upon the intervention of the Supreme Being in this affair, she would fall into serious errors. We should not deceive the young. Mademoiselle is beyond the age when girls are informed that their little brother was found under a cabbage."

"You evidently want to get me confused," she replies, smiling and showing the loveliest teeth in the world. "I am not strong enough to argue with you, so I beg you to let me go on with Josephine. What was I saying?"

"That if I get married, I shall have children," returns the young lady.

"Very well. I will not represent things to you worse than they are, but it is extremely probable that each child will cost you a tooth. With every baby I have lost a tooth."

"Happily," I remark at this, "this trouble was with you less than petty, it was positively nothing." – They were side teeth. – "But take notice, miss, that this vexation has no absolute, unvarying character as such. The annoyance depends upon the condition of the tooth. If the baby causes the loss of a decayed tooth, you are fortunate to have a baby the more and a bad tooth the less. Don't let us confound blessings with bothers. Ah! if you were to lose one of your magnificent front teeth, that would be another thing! And yet there is many a woman that would give the best tooth in her head for a fine, healthy boy!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.