ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES TRILOGY: PARIS, COMPLETE

Эмиль Золя

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Содержание

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BOOK I

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

WITH the present work M. Zola completes the "Trilogy of the Three Cities," which he began with "Lourdes" and continued with "Rome"; and thus the adventures and experiences of Abbe Pierre Froment, the doubting Catholic priest who failed to find faith at the miraculous grotto by the Cave, and hope amidst the crumbling theocracy of the Vatican, are here brought to what, from M. Zola's point of view, is their logical conclusion. From the first pages of "Lourdes," many readers will have divined that Abbe Froment was bound to finish as he does, for, frankly, no other finish was possible from a writer of M. Zola's opinions.

Taking the Trilogy as a whole, one will find that it is essentially symbolical. Abbe Froment is Man, and his struggles are the struggles between Religion, as personified by the Roman Catholic Church, on the one hand, and Reason and Life on the other. In the Abbe's case the victory ultimately rests with the latter; and we may take it as being M. Zola's opinion that the same will eventually be the case with the great bulk of mankind. English writers are often accused of treating subjects from an insular point of view, and certainly there may be good ground for such a charge. But they are not the only writers guilty of the practice. The purview of French authors is often quite as limited: they regard French opinion as the only good opinion, and judge the rest of the world by their own standard. In the present case, if we leave the world and mankind generally on one side, and apply M. Zola's facts and theories to France alone, it will be found, I think, that he has made out a remarkably good case for himself. For it is certain that Catholicism, I may say Christianity, is fast crumbling in France. There may be revivals in certain limited circles, efforts of the greatest energy to prop up the tottering edifice by a "rallying" of believers to the democratic cause, and by a kindling of the most bitter anti-Semitic warfare; but all these revivals and efforts, although they are extremely well-advertised and create no little stir, produce very little impression on the bulk of the population. So far as France is concerned, the policy of Leo XIII. seems to have come too late. The French masses regard Catholicism or Christianity, whichever one pleases, as a religion of death, – a religion which, taking its stand on the text "There shall always be poor among you," condemns them to toil and moil in poverty and distress their whole life long, with no other consolation than the promise of happiness in heaven. And, on the other hand, they see the ministers of the Deity, "whose kingdom is not of this world," supporting the wealthy and powerful, and striving to secure wealth and power for themselves. Charity exists, of course, but the masses declare that it is no remedy; they do not ask for doles, they ask for Justice. It is largely by reason of all this that Socialism and Anarchism have made such great strides in France of recent years. Robespierre, as will be remembered, once tried to suppress Christianity altogether, and for a time certainly there was a virtually general cessation of religious observances in France. But no such Reign of Terror prevails there to-day. Men are perfectly free to believe if they are inclined to do so; and yet never were there fewer religious marriages, fewer baptisms or smaller congregations in the French churches. I refer not merely to Paris and other large cities, but to the smaller towns, and even the little hamlets of many parts. Old village priests, men practising what they teach and possessed of the most loving, benevolent hearts, have told me with tears in their eyes of the growing infidelity of their parishioners.

I have been studying this matter for some years, and write without prejudice, merely setting down what I believe to be the truth. Of course we are all aware that the most stupendous efforts are being made by the Catholic clergy and zealous believers to bring about a revival of the faith, and certainly in some circles there has been a measure of success. But the reconversion of a nation is the most formidable of tasks; and, in my own opinion, as in M. Zola's, France as a whole is lost to the Christian religion. On this proposition, combined with a second one, namely, that even as France as a nation will be the first to discard Christianity, so she will be the first to promulgate a new faith based on reason, science and the teachings of life, is founded the whole argument of M. Zola's Trilogy.

Having thus dealt with the Trilogy's religious aspects, I would now speak of "Paris," its concluding volume. This is very different from "Lourdes" and "Rome." Whilst recounting the struggles and fate of Abbe Froment and his brother Guillaume, and entering largely into the problem of Capital and Labour, which problem has done so much to turn the masses away from Christianity, it contains many an interesting and valuable picture of the Parisian world at the close of the nineteenth century. It is no guide-book to Paris; but it paints the city's social life, its rich and poor, its scandals and crimes, its work and its pleasures. Among the households to which the reader is introduced are those of a banker, an aged Countess of the old *noblesse*, a cosmopolitan Princess, of a kind that Paris knows only too well, a scientist, a manufacturer, a working mechanician, a priest, an Anarchist, a petty clerk and an actress of a class that so often dishonours the French stage. Science and art and learning and religion, all have their representatives. Then, too, the political world is well to the front. There are honest and unscrupulous Ministers of State, upright and venal deputies, enthusiastic and cautious candidates for power, together with social theoreticians of various schools. And the *blase*, weak-minded man of fashion is here, as well as the young "symbolist" of perverted, degraded mind. The women are of all types, from the most loathsome to the most lovable. Then, too, the journalists are portrayed in such life-like fashion that I might give each of them his real name. And journalism, Parisian journalism, is flagellated, shown as it really is, – if just a few well-conducted organs be excepted, – that is, venal and impudent, mendacious and even petty.

The actual scenes depicted are quite as kaleidoscopic as are the characters in their variety. We enter the banker's gilded saloon and the hovel of the pauper, the busy factory, the priest's retired home and the laboratory of the scientist. We wait in the lobbies of the Chamber of Deputies, and afterwards witness "a great debate"; we penetrate into the private sanctum of a Minister of the Interior; we attend a fashionable wedding at the Madeleine and a first performance at the Comedie Francaise; we dine at the Cafe Anglais and listen to a notorious vocalist in a low music hall at Montmartre; we pursue an Anarchist through the Bois de Boulogne; we slip into the Assize Court and see that Anarchist tried there; we afterwards gaze upon his execution by the guillotine; we are also on the boulevards when the lamps are lighted for a long night of revelry, and we stroll along the quiet streets in the small hours of the morning, when crime and homeless want are prowling round.

And ever the scene changes; the whole world of Paris passes before one. Yet the book, to my thinking, is far less descriptive than analytical. The souls of the principal characters are probed to their lowest depths. Many of the scenes, too, are intensely dramatic, admirably adapted for the stage; as, for instance, Baroness Duvillard's interview with her daughter in the chapter which I have called "The Rivals." And side by side with baseness there is heroism, while beauty of the flesh finds its counterpart in beauty of the mind. M. Zola has often been reproached for showing us the vileness of human nature; and no doubt such vileness may be found in "Paris," but there are contrasting pictures. If some of M. Zola's characters horrify the reader, there are others that the latter can but admire. Life is compounded of good and evil, and unfortunately it is usually the evil that makes the most noise and attracts the most attention. Moreover, in M. Zola's case, it has always been his purpose to expose the evils from which society suffers in the hope of directing attention to them and thereby hastening a remedy, and thus, in the course of his works, he could not do otherwise than drag the whole frightful mass of human villany and degradation into the full light of day. But if there are, again, black pages

in “Paris,” others, bright and comforting, will be found near them. And the book ends in no pessimist strain. Whatever may be thought of the writer’s views on religion, most readers will, I imagine, agree with his opinion that, despite much social injustice, much crime, vice, cupidity and baseness, we are ever marching on to better things.

In the making of the coming, though still far-away, era of truth and justice, Paris, he thinks, will play the leading part, for whatever the stains upon her, they are but surface-deep; her heart remains good and sound; she has genius and courage and energy and wit and fancy. She can be generous, too, when she chooses, and more than once her ideas have irradiated the world. Thus M. Zola hopes much from her, and who will gainsay him? Not I, who can apply to her the words which Byron addressed to the home of my own and M. Zola’s forefathers: —

> “I loved her from my boyhood; she to me
> Was as a fairy city of the heart.”

Thus I can but hope that Paris, where I learnt the little I know, where I struggled and found love and happiness, whose every woe and disaster and triumph I have shared for over thirty years, may, however dark the clouds that still pass over her, some day fully justify M. Zola’s confidence, and bring to pass his splendid dream of perfect truth and perfect justice.

E. A. V. MERTON, SURREY, ENGLAND,
Feb. 5, 1898.

I. THE PRIEST AND THE POOR

THAT morning, one towards the end of January, Abbe Pierre Froment, who had a mass to say at the Sacred Heart at Montmartre, was on the height, in front of the basilica, already at eight o'clock. And before going in he gazed for a moment upon the immensity of Paris spread out below him.

After two months of bitter cold, ice and snow, the city was steeped in a mournful, quivering thaw. From the far-spreading, leaden-hued heavens a thick mist fell like a mourning shroud. All the eastern portion of the city, the abodes of misery and toil, seemed submerged beneath ruddy steam, amid which the panting of workshops and factories could be divined; while westwards, towards the districts of wealth and enjoyment, the fog broke and lightened, becoming but a fine and motionless veil of vapour. The curved line of the horizon could scarcely be divined, the expanse of houses, which nothing bounded, appeared like a chaos of stone, studded with stagnant pools, which filled the hollows with pale steam; whilst against them the summits of the edifices, the housetops of the loftier streets, showed black like soot. It was a Paris of mystery, shrouded by clouds, buried as it were beneath the ashes of some disaster, already half-sunken in the suffering and the shame of that which its immensity concealed.

Thin and sombre in his flimsy cassock, Pierre was looking on when Abbe Rose, who seemed to have sheltered himself behind a pillar of the porch on purpose to watch for him, came forward: "Ah! it's you at last, my dear child," said he, "I have something to ask you."

He seemed embarrassed and anxious, and glanced round distrustfully to make sure that nobody was near. Then, as if the solitude thereabouts did not suffice to reassure him, he led Pierre some distance away, through the icy, biting wind, which he himself did not seem to feel. "This is the matter," he resumed, "I have been told that a poor fellow, a former house-painter, an old man of seventy, who naturally can work no more, is dying of hunger in a hovel in the Rue des Saules. So, my dear child, I thought of you. I thought you would consent to take him these three francs from me, so that he may at least have some bread to eat for a few days."

"But why don't you take him your alms yourself?"

At this Abbe Rose again grew anxious, and cast vague, frightened glances about him. "Oh, no, oh, no!" he said, "I can no longer do that after all the worries that have befallen me. You know that I am watched, and should get another scolding if I were caught giving alms like this, scarcely knowing to whom I give them. It is true that I had to sell something to get these three francs. But, my dear child, render me this service, I pray you."

Pierre, with heart oppressed, stood contemplating the old priest, whose locks were quite white, whose full lips spoke of infinite kindliness, and whose eyes shone clear and childlike in his round and smiling face. And he bitterly recalled the story of that lover of the poor, the semi-disgrace into which he had fallen through the sublime candour of his charitable goodness. His little ground-floor of the Rue de Charonne, which he had turned into a refuge where he offered shelter to all the wretchedness of the streets, had ended by giving cause for scandal. His *naivete* and innocence had been abused; and abominable things had gone on under his roof without his knowledge. Vice had turned the asylum into a meeting-place; and at last, one night, the police had descended upon it to arrest a young girl accused of infanticide. Greatly concerned by this scandal, the diocesan authorities had forced Abbe Rose to close his shelter, and had removed him from the church of Ste. Marguerite to that of St. Pierre of Montmartre, where he now again acted as curate. Truth to tell, it was not a disgrace but a removal to another spot. However, he had been scolded and was watched, as he said; and he was much ashamed of it, and very unhappy at being only able to give alms by stealth, much like some harebrained prodigal who blushes for his faults.

Pierre took the three francs. "I promise to execute your commission, my friend, oh! with all my heart," he said.

"You will go after your mass, won't you? His name is Laveuve, he lives in the Rue des Saules in a house with a courtyard, just before reaching the Rue Marcadet. You are sure to find it. And if you want to be very kind you will tell me of your visit this evening at five o'clock, at the Madeleine, where I am going to hear Monseigneur Martha's address. He has been so good to me! Won't you also come to hear him?"

Pierre made an evasive gesture. Monseigneur Martha, Bishop of Persepolis and all powerful at the archiepiscopal palace, since, like the genial propagandist he was, he had been devoting himself to increasing the subscriptions for the basilica of the Sacred Heart, had indeed supported Abbe Rose; in fact, it was by his influence that the abbe had been kept in Paris, and placed once more at St. Pierre de Montmartre.

"I don't know if I shall be able to hear the address," said Pierre, "but in any case I will go there to meet you."

The north wind was blowing, and the gloomy cold penetrated both of them on that deserted summit amidst the fog which changed the vast city into a misty ocean. However, some footsteps were heard, and Abbe Rose, again mistrustful, saw a man go by, a tall and sturdy man, who wore clogs and was bareheaded, showing his thick and closely-cut white hair. "Is not that your brother?" asked the old priest.

Pierre had not stirred. "Yes, it is my brother Guillaume," he quietly responded. "I have found him again since I have been coming occasionally to the Sacred Heart. He owns a house close by, where he has been living for more than twenty years, I think. When we meet we shake hands, but I have never even been to his house. Oh! all is quite dead between us, we have nothing more in common, we are parted by worlds."

Abbe Rose's tender smile again appeared, and he waved his hand as if to say that one must never despair of love. Guillaume Froment, a savant of lofty intelligence, a chemist who lived apart from others, like one who rebelled against the social system, was now a parishioner of the abbe's, and when the latter passed the house where Guillaume lived with his three sons – a house all alive with work – he must often have dreamt of leading him back to God.

"But, my dear child," he resumed, "I am keeping you here in this dark cold, and you are not warm. Go and say your mass. Till this evening, at the Madeleine." Then, in entreating fashion, after again making sure that none could hear them, he added, still with the air of a child at fault: "And not a word to anybody about my little commission – it would again be said that I don't know how to conduct myself."

Pierre watched the old priest as he went off towards the Rue Cartot, where he lived on a damp ground-floor, enlivened by a strip of garden. The veil of disaster, which was submerging Paris, now seemed to grow thicker under the gusts of the icy north wind. And at last Pierre entered the basilica, his heart upset, overflowing with the bitterness stirred up by the recollection of Abbe Rose's story – that bankruptcy of charity, the frightful irony of a holy man punished for bestowing alms, and hiding himself that he might still continue to bestow them. Nothing could calm the smart of the wound reopened in Pierre's heart – neither the warm peacefulness into which he entered, nor the silent solemnity of the broad, deep fabric, whose new stonework was quite bare, without a single painting or any kind of decoration; the nave being still half-barred by the scaffoldings which blocked up the unfinished dome. At that early hour the masses of entreaty had already been said at several altars, under the grey light falling from the high and narrow windows, and the tapers of entreaty were burning in the depths of the apse. So Pierre made haste to go to the sacristy, there to assume his vestments in order that he might say his mass in the chapel of St. Vincent de Paul.

But the floodgates of memory had been opened, and he had no thought but for his distress whilst, in mechanical fashion, he performed the rites and made the customary gestures. Since his return from Rome three years previously, he had been living in the very worst anguish that can fall on man. At the outset, in order to recover his lost faith, he had essayed a first experiment: he had gone

to Lourdes, there to seek the innocent belief of the child who kneels and prays, the primitive faith of young nations bending beneath the terror born of ignorance; but he had rebelled yet more than ever in presence of what he had witnessed at Lourdes: that glorification of the absurd, that collapse of common sense; and was convinced that salvation, the peace of men and nations nowadays, could not lie in that puerile relinquishment of reason. And afterwards, again yielding to the need of loving whilst yet allowing reason, so hard to satisfy, her share in his intellect, he had staked his final peace on a second experiment, and had gone to Rome to see if Catholicism could there be renewed, could revert to the spirit of primitive Christianity and become the religion of the democracy, the faith which the modern world, upheaving and in danger of death, was awaiting in order to calm down and live. And he had found there naught but ruins, the rotted trunk of a tree that could never put forth another springtide; and he had heard there naught but the supreme rending of the old social edifice, near to its fall. Then it was, that, relapsing into boundless doubt, total negation, he had been recalled to Paris by Abbe Rose, in the name of their poor, and had returned thither that he might forget and immolate himself and believe in them – the poor – since they and their frightful sufferings alone remained certain. And then it was too, that for three years he came into contact with that collapse, that very bankruptcy of goodness itself: charity a derision, charity useless and flouted.

Those three years had been lived by Pierre amidst ever-growing torments, in which his whole being had ended by sinking. His faith was forever dead; dead, too, even his hope of utilising the faith of the multitudes for the general salvation. He denied everything, he anticipated nothing but the final, inevitable catastrophe: revolt, massacre and conflagration, which would sweep away a guilty and condemned world. Unbelieving priest that he was, yet watching over the faith of others, honestly, chastely discharging his duties, full of haughty sadness at the thought that he had been unable to renounce his mind as he had renounced his flesh and his dream of being a saviour of the nations, he withal remained erect, full of fierce yet solitary grandeur. And this despairing, denying priest, who had dived to the bottom of nothingness, retained such a lofty and grave demeanour, perfumed by such pure kindness, that in his parish of Neuilly he had acquired the reputation of being a young saint, one beloved by Providence, whose prayers wrought miracles. He was but a personification of the rules of the Church; of the priest he retained only the gestures; he was like an empty sepulchre in which not even the ashes of hope remained; yet grief-stricken weeping women worshipped him and kissed his cassock; and it was a tortured mother whose infant was in danger of death, who had implored him to come and ask that infant's cure of Jesus, certain as she felt that Jesus would grant her the boon in that sanctuary of Montmartre where blazed the prodigy of His heart, all burning with love.

Clad in his vestments, Pierre had reached the chapel of St. Vincent de Paul. He there ascended the altar-step and began the mass; and when he turned round with hands spread out to bless the worshippers he showed his hollow cheeks, his gentle mouth contracted by bitterness, his loving eyes darkened by suffering. He was no longer the young priest whose countenance had glowed with tender fever on the road to Lourdes, whose face had been illumined by apostolic fervour when he started for Rome. The two hereditary influences which were ever at strife within him – that of his father to whom he owed his impregnable, towering brow, that of his mother who had given him his love-thirsting lips, were still waging war, the whole human battle of sentiment and reason, in that now ravaged face of his, whither in moments of forgetfulness ascended all the chaos of internal suffering. The lips still confessed that unquenched thirst for love, self-bestowal and life, which he well thought he could nevermore content, whilst the solid brow, the citadel which made him suffer, obstinately refused to capitulate, whatever might be the assaults of error. But he stiffened himself, hid the horror of the void in which he struggled, and showed himself superb, making each gesture, repeating each word in sovereign fashion. And gazing at him through her tears, the mother who was there among the few kneeling women, the mother who awaited a supreme intercession from him, who thought him in communion with Jesus for the salvation of her child, beheld him radiant with angelic beauty like some messenger of the divine grace.

When, after the offertory, Pierre uncovered the chalice he felt contempt for himself. The shock had been too great, and he thought of those things in spite of all. What puerility there had been in his two experiments at Lourdes and Rome, the *naivete* of a poor distracted being, consumed by desire to love and believe. To have imagined that present-day science would in his person accommodate itself to the faith of the year One Thousand, and in particular to have foolishly believed that he, petty priest that he was, would be able to indoctrinate the Pope and prevail on him to become a saint and change the face of the world! It all filled him with shame; how people must have laughed at him! Then, too, his idea of a schism made him blush. He again beheld himself at Rome, dreaming of writing a book by which he would violently sever himself from Catholicism to preach the new religion of the democracies, the purified, human and living Gospel. But what ridiculous folly! A schism? He had known in Paris an abbe of great heart and mind who had attempted to bring about that famous, predicted, awaited schism. Ah! the poor man, the sad, the ludicrous labour in the midst of universal incredulity, the icy indifference of some, the mockery and the reviling of others! If Luther were to come to France in our days he would end, forgotten and dying of hunger, on a Batignolles fifth-floor. A schism cannot succeed among a people that no longer believes, that has ceased to take all interest in the Church, and sets its hope elsewhere. And it was all Catholicism, in fact all Christianity, that would be swept away, for, apart from certain moral maxims, the Gospel no longer supplied a possible code for society. And this conviction increased Pierre's torment on the days when his cassock weighed more heavily on his shoulders, when he ended by feeling contempt for himself at thus celebrating the divine mystery of the mass, which for him had become but the formula of a dead religion.

Having half filled the chalice with wine from the vase, Pierre washed his hands and again perceived the mother with her face of ardent entreaty. Then he thought it was for her that, with the charitable leanings of a vow-bound man, he had remained a priest, a priest without belief, feeding the belief of others with the bread of illusion. But this heroic conduct, the haughty spirit of duty in which he imprisoned himself, was not practised by him without growing anguish. Did not elementary probity require that he should cast aside the cassock and return into the midst of men? At certain times the falsity of his position filled him with disgust for his useless heroism; and he asked himself if it were not cowardly and dangerous to leave the masses in superstition. Certainly the theory of a just and vigilant Providence, of a future paradise where all these sufferings of the world would receive compensation, had long seemed necessary to the wretchedness of mankind; but what a trap lay in it, what a pretext for the tyrannical grinding down of nations; and how far more virile it would be to undeceive the nations, however brutally, and give them courage to live the real life, even if it were in tears. If they were already turning aside from Christianity was not this because they needed a more human ideal, a religion of health and joy which should not be a religion of death? On the day when the idea of charity should crumble, Christianity would crumble also, for it was built upon the idea of divine charity correcting the injustice of fate, and offering future rewards to those who might suffer in this life. And it was crumbling; for the poor no longer believed in it, but grew angry at the thought of that deceptive paradise, with the promise of which their patience had been beguiled so long, and demanded that their share of happiness should not always be put off until the morrow of death. A cry for justice arose from every lip, for justice upon this earth, justice for those who hunger and thirst, whom alms are weary of relieving after eighteen hundred years of Gospel teaching, and who still and ever lack bread to eat.

When Pierre, with his elbows on the altar, had emptied the chalice after breaking the sacred wafer, he felt himself sinking into yet greater distress. And so a third experiment was beginning for him, the supreme battle of justice against charity, in which his heart and his mind would struggle together in that great Paris, so full of terrible, unknown things. The need for the divine still battled within him against domineering intelligence. How among the masses would one ever be able to content the thirst for the mysterious? Leaving the *elite* on one side, would science suffice to pacify desire, lull suffering, and satisfy the dream? And what would become of himself in the bankruptcy of that same

charity, which for three years had alone kept him erect by occupying his every hour, and giving him the illusion of self-devotion, of being useful to others? It seemed, all at once, as if the ground sank beneath him, and he heard nothing save the cry of the masses, silent so long, but now demanding justice, growling and threatening to take their share, which was withheld from them by force and ruse. Nothing more, it seemed, could delay the inevitable catastrophe, the fratricidal class warfare that would sweep away the olden world, which was condemned to disappear beneath the mountain of its crimes. Every hour with frightful sadness he expected the collapse, Paris steeped in blood, Paris in flames. And his horror of all violence froze him; he knew not where to seek the new belief which might dissipate the peril. Fully conscious, though he was, that the social and religious problems are but one, and are alone in question in the dreadful daily labour of Paris, he was too deeply troubled himself, too far removed from ordinary things by his position as a priest, and too sorely rent by doubt and powerlessness to tell as yet where might be truth, and health, and life. Ah! to be healthy and to live, to content at last both heart and reason in the peace, the certain, simply honest labour, which man has come to accomplish upon this earth!

The mass was finished, and Pierre descended from the altar, when the weeping mother, near whom he passed, caught hold of a corner of the chasuble with her trembling hands, and kissed it with wild fervour, as one may kiss some relic of a saint from whom one expects salvation. She thanked him for the miracle which he must have accomplished, certain as she felt that she would find her child cured. And he was deeply stirred by that love, that ardent faith of hers, in spite of the sudden and yet keener distress which he felt at being in no wise the sovereign minister that she thought him, the minister able to obtain a respite from Death. But he dismissed her consoled and strengthened, and it was with an ardent prayer that he entreated the unknown but conscious Power to succour the poor creature. Then, when he had divested himself in the sacristy, and found himself again out of doors before the basilica, lashed by the keen wintry wind, a mortal shiver came upon him, and froze him, while through the mist he looked to see if a whirlwind of anger and justice had not swept Paris away: that catastrophe which must some day destroy it, leaving under the leaden heavens only the pestilential quagmire of its ruins.

Pierre wished to fulfil Abbe Rose's commission immediately. He followed the Rue des Norvins, on the crest of Montmartre; and, reaching the Rue des Saules, descended by its steep slope, between mossy walls, to the other side of Paris. The three francs which he was holding in his cassock's pocket, filled him at once with gentle emotion and covert anger against the futility of charity. But as he gradually descended by the sharp declivities and interminable storeys of steps, the mournful nooks of misery which he espied took possession of him, and infinite pity wrung his heart. A whole new district was here being built alongside the broad thoroughfares opened since the great works of the Sacred Heart had begun. Lofty middle-class houses were already rising among ripped-up gardens and plots of vacant land, still edged with palings. And these houses with their substantial frontages, all new and white, lent a yet more sombre and leprous aspect to such of the old shaky buildings as remained, the low pot-houses with blood-coloured walls, the *cites* of workmen's dwellings, those abodes of suffering with black, soiled buildings in which human cattle were piled. Under the low-hanging sky that day, the pavement, dented by heavily-laden carts, was covered with mud; the thaw soaked the walls with an icy dampness, whilst all the filth and destitution brought terrible sadness to the heart.

After going as far as the Rue Marcadet, Pierre retraced his steps; and in the Rue des Saules, certain that he was not mistaken, he entered the courtyard of a kind of barracks or hospital, encompassed by three irregular buildings. This court was a quagmire, where filth must have accumulated during the two months of terrible frost; and now all was melting, and an abominable stench arose. The buildings were half falling, the gaping vestibules looked like cellar holes, strips of paper streaked the cracked and filthy window-panes, and vile rags hung about like flags of death. Inside a shanty which served as the door-keeper's abode Pierre only saw an infirm man rolled up in a tattered strip of what had once been a horse-cloth.

"You have an old workman named Laveuve here," said the priest. "Which staircase is it, which floor?"

The man did not answer, but opened his anxious eyes, like a scared idiot. The door-keeper, no doubt, was in the neighbourhood. For a moment the priest waited; then seeing a little girl on the other side of the courtyard, he risked himself, crossed the quagmire on tip-toe, and asked: "Do you know an old workman named Laveuve in the house, my child?"

The little girl, who only had a ragged gown of pink cotton stuff about her meagre figure, stood there shivering, her hands covered with chilblains. She raised her delicate face, which looked pretty though nipped by the cold: "Laveuve," said she, "no, don't know, don't know." And with the unconscious gesture of a beggar child she put out one of her poor, numbed and disfigured hands. Then, when the priest had given her a little bit of silver, she began to prance through the mud like a joyful goat, singing the while in a shrill voice: "Don't know, don't know."

Pierre decided to follow her. She vanished into one of the gaping vestibules, and, in her rear, he climbed a dark and fetid staircase, whose steps were half-broken and so slippery, on account of the vegetable parings strewn over them, that he had to avail himself of the greasy rope by which the inmates hoisted themselves upwards. But every door was closed; he vainly knocked at several of them, and only elicited, at the last, a stifled growl, as though some despairing animal were confined within. Returning to the yard, he hesitated, then made his way to another staircase, where he was deafened by piercing cries, as of a child who is being butchered. He climbed on hearing this noise and at last found himself in front of an open room where an infant, who had been left alone, tied in his little chair, in order that he might not fall, was howling and howling without drawing breath. Then Pierre went down again, upset, frozen by the sight of so much destitution and abandonment.

But a woman was coming in, carrying three potatoes in her apron, and on being questioned by him she gazed distrustfully at his cassock. "Laveuve, Laveuve? I can't say," she replied. "If the door-keeper were there, she might be able to tell you. There are five staircases, you see, and we don't all know each other. Besides, there are so many changes. Still try over there; at the far end."

The staircase at the back of the yard was yet more abominable than the others, its steps warped, its walls slimy, as if soaked with the sweat of anguish. At each successive floor the drain-sinks exhaled a pestilential stench, whilst from every lodging came moans, or a noise of quarrelling, or some frightful sign of misery. A door swung open, and a man appeared dragging a woman by the hair whilst three youngsters sobbed aloud. On the next floor, Pierre caught a glimpse of a room where a young girl in her teens, racked by coughing, was hastily carrying an infant to and fro to quiet it, in despair that all the milk of her breast should be exhausted. Then, in an adjoining lodging, came the poignant spectacle of three beings, half clad in shreds, apparently sexless and ageless, who, amidst the dire bareness of their room, were gluttonously eating from the same earthen pan some pottage which even dogs would have refused. They barely raised their heads to growl, and did not answer Pierre's questions.

He was about to go down again, when right atop of the stairs, at the entry of a passage, it occurred to him to make a last try by knocking at the door. It was opened by a woman whose uncombed hair was already getting grey, though she could not be more than forty; while her pale lips, and dim eyes set in a yellow countenance, expressed utter lassitude, the shrinking, the constant dread of one whom wretchedness has pitilessly assailed. The sight of Pierre's cassock disturbed her, and she stammered anxiously: "Come in, come in, Monsieur l'Abbe."

However, a man whom Pierre had not at first seen – a workman also of some forty years, tall, thin and bald, with scanty moustache and beard of a washed-out reddish hue – made an angry gesture – a threat as it were – to turn the priest out of doors. But he calmed himself, sat down near a rickety table and pretended to turn his back. And as there was also a child present – a fair-haired girl, eleven or twelve years old, with a long and gentle face and that intelligent and somewhat aged expression which great misery imparts to children – he called her to him, and held her between his knees, doubtless to keep her away from the man in the cassock.

Pierre – whose heart was oppressed by his reception, and who realised the utter destitution of this family by the sight of the bare, fireless room, and the distressed mournfulness of its three inmates – decided all the same to repeat his question: “Madame, do you know an old workman named Laveuve in the house?”

The woman – who now trembled at having admitted him, since it seemed to displease her man – timidly tried to arrange matters. “Laveuve, Laveuve? no, I don’t. But Salvat, you hear? Do you know a Laveuve here?”

Salvat merely shrugged his shoulders; but the little girl could not keep her tongue still: “I say, mamma Theodore, it’s p’raps the Philosopher.”

“A former house-painter,” continued Pierre, “an old man who is ill and past work.”

Madame Theodore was at once enlightened. “In that case it’s him, it’s him. We call him the Philosopher, a nickname folks have given him in the neighbourhood. But there’s nothing to prevent his real name from being Laveuve.”

With one of his fists raised towards the ceiling, Salvat seemed to be protesting against the abomination of a world and a Providence that allowed old toilers to die of hunger just like broken-down beasts. However, he did not speak, but relapsed into the savage, heavy silence, the bitter meditation in which he had been plunged when the priest arrived. He was a journeyman engineer, and gazed obstinately at the table where lay his little leather tool-bag, bulging with something it contained – something, perhaps, which he had to take back to a work-shop. He might have been thinking of a long, enforced spell of idleness, of a vain search for any kind of work during the two previous months of that terrible winter. Or perhaps it was the coming bloody reprisals of the starvelings that occupied the fiery reverie which set his large, strange, vague blue eyes aglow. All at once he noticed that his daughter had taken up the tool-bag and was trying to open it to see what it might contain. At this he quivered and at last spoke, his voice kindly, yet bitter with sudden emotion, which made him turn pale. “Celine, you must leave that alone. I forbade you to touch my tools,” said he; then taking the bag, he deposited it with great precaution against the wall behind him.

“And so, madame,” asked Pierre, “this man Laveuve lives on this floor?”

Madame Theodore directed a timid, questioning glance at Salvat. She was not in favour of hustling priests when they took the trouble to call, for at times there was a little money to be got from them. And when she realised that Salvat, who had once more relapsed into his black reverie, left her free to act as she pleased, she at once tendered her services. “If Monsieur l’Abbe is agreeable, I will conduct him. It’s just at the end of the passage. But one must know the way, for there are still some steps to climb.”

Celine, finding a pastime in this visit, escaped from her father’s knees and likewise accompanied the priest. And Salvat remained alone in that den of poverty and suffering, injustice and anger, without a fire, without bread, haunted by his burning dream, his eyes again fixed upon his bag, as if there, among his tools, he possessed the wherewithal to heal the ailing world.

It indeed proved necessary to climb a few more steps; and then, following Madame Theodore and Celine, Pierre found himself in a kind of narrow garret under the roof, a loft a few yards square, where one could not stand erect. There was no window, only a skylight, and as the snow still covered it one had to leave the door wide open in order that one might see. And the thaw was entering the place, the melting snow was falling drop by drop, and coming over the tiled floor. After long weeks of intense cold, dark dampness rained quivering over all. And there, lacking even a chair, even a plank, Laveuve lay in a corner on a little pile of filthy rags spread upon the bare tiles; he looked like some animal dying on a dung-heap.

“There!” said Celine in her sing-song voice, “there he is, that’s the Philosopher!”

Madame Theodore had bent down to ascertain if he still lived. “Yes, he breathes; he’s sleeping I think. Oh! if he only had something to eat every day, he would be well enough. But what would you have? He has nobody left him, and when one gets to seventy the best is to throw oneself into the

river. In the house-painting line it often happens that a man has to give up working on ladders and scaffoldings at fifty. He at first found some work to do on the ground level. Then he was lucky enough to get a job as night watchman. But that's over, he's been turned away from everywhere, and, for two months now, he's been lying in this nook waiting to die. The landlord hasn't dared to fling him into the street as yet, though not for want of any inclination that way. We others sometimes bring him a little wine and a crust, of course; but when one has nothing oneself, how can one give to others?"

Pierre, terrified, gazed at that frightful remnant of humanity, that remnant into which fifty years of toil, misery and social injustice had turned a man. And he ended by distinguishing Laveuve's white, worn, sunken, deformed head. Here, on a human face, appeared all the ruin following upon hopeless labour. Laveuve's unkempt beard straggled over his features, suggesting an old horse that is no longer cropped; his toothless jaws were quite askew, his eyes were vitreous, and his nose seemed to plunge into his mouth. But above all else one noticed his resemblance to some beast of burden, deformed by hard toil, lamed, worn to death, and now only good for the knackers.

"Ah! the poor fellow," muttered the shuddering priest. "And he is left to die of hunger, all alone, without any succour? And not a hospital, not an asylum has given him shelter?"

"Well," resumed Madame Theodore in her sad yet resigned voice, "the hospitals are built for the sick, and he isn't sick, he's simply finishing off, with his strength at an end. Besides he isn't always easy to deal with. People came again only lately to put him in an asylum, but he won't be shut up. And he speaks coarsely to those who question him, not to mention that he has the reputation of liking drink and talking badly about the gentle-folks. But, thank Heaven, he will now soon be delivered."

Pierre had leant forward on seeing Laveuve's eyes open, and he spoke to him tenderly, telling him that he had come from a friend with a little money to enable him to buy what he might most pressingly require. At first, on seeing Pierre's cassock, the old man had growled some coarse words; but, despite his extreme feebleness, he still retained the pert chaffing spirit of the Parisian artisan: "Well, then, I'll willingly drink a drop," he said distinctly, "and have a bit of bread with it, if there's the needful; for I've lost taste of both for a couple of days past."

Celine offered her services, and Madame Theodore sent her to fetch a loaf and a quart of wine with Abbe Rose's money. And in the interval she told Pierre how Laveuve was at one moment to have entered the Asylum of the Invalids of Labour, a charitable enterprise whose lady patronesses were presided over by Baroness Duvillard. However, the usual regulation inquiries had doubtless led to such an unfavourable report that matters had gone no further.

"Baroness Duvillard! but I know her, and will go to see her to-day!" exclaimed Pierre, whose heart was bleeding. "It is impossible for a man to be left in such circumstances any longer."

Then, as Celine came back with the loaf and the wine, the three of them tried to make Laveuve more comfortable, raised him on his heap of rags, gave him to eat and to drink, and then left the remainder of the wine and the loaf – a large four-pound loaf – near him, recommending him to wait awhile before he finished the bread, as otherwise he might stifle.

"Monsieur l'Abbe ought to give me his address in case I should have any news to send him," said Madame Theodore when she again found herself at her door.

Pierre had no card with him, and so all three went into the room. But Salvat was no longer alone there. He stood talking in a low voice very quickly, and almost mouth to mouth, with a young fellow of twenty. The latter, who was slim and dark, with a sprouting beard and hair cut in brush fashion, had bright eyes, a straight nose and thin lips set in a pale and slightly freckled face, betokening great intelligence. With stern and stubborn brow, he stood shivering in his well-worn jacket.

"Monsieur l'Abbe wants to leave me his address for the Philosopher's affair," gently explained Madame Theodore, annoyed to find another there with Salvat.

The two men had glanced at the priest and then looked at one another, each with terrible mien. And they suddenly ceased speaking in the bitter cold which fell from the ceiling. Then, again with infinite precaution, Salvat went to take his tool-bag from alongside the wall.

"So you are going down, you are again going to look for work?" asked Madame Theodore.

He did not answer, but merely made an angry gesture, as if to say that he would no longer have anything to do with work since work for so long a time had not cared to have anything to do with him.

"All the same," resumed the woman, "try to bring something back with you, for you know there's nothing. At what time will you be back?"

With another gesture he seemed to answer that he would come back when he could, perhaps never. And tears rising, despite all his efforts, to his vague, blue, glowing eyes he caught hold of his daughter Celine, kissed her violently, distractedly, and then went off, with his bag under his arm, followed by his young companion.

"Celine," resumed Madame Theodore, "give Monsieur l'Abbe your pencil, and, see, monsieur, seat yourself here, it will be better for writing."

Then, when Pierre had installed himself at the table, on the chair previously occupied by Salvat, she went on talking, seeking to excuse her man for his scanty politeness: "He hasn't a bad heart, but he's had so many worries in life that he has become a bit cracked. It's like that young man whom you just saw here, Monsieur Victor Mathis. There's another for you, who isn't happy, a young man who was well brought up, who has a lot of learning, and whose mother, a widow, has only just got the wherewithal to buy bread. So one can understand it, can't one? It all upsets their heads, and they talk of blowing up everybody. For my part those are not my notions, but I forgive them, oh! willingly enough."

Perturbed, yet interested by all the mystery and vague horror which he could divine around him, Pierre made no haste to write his address, but lingered listening, as if inviting confidence.

"If you only knew, Monsieur l'Abbe, that poor Salvat was a forsaken child, without father or mother, and had to scour the roads and try every trade at first to get a living. Then afterwards he became a mechanician, and a very good workman, I assure you, very skilful and very painstaking. But he already had those ideas of his, and quarrelled with people, and tried to bring his mates over to his views; and so he was unable to stay anywhere. At last, when he was thirty, he was stupid enough to go to America with an inventor, who traded on him to such a point that after six years of it he came back ill and penniless. I must tell you that he had married my younger sister Leonie, and that she died before he went to America, leaving him little Celine, who was then only a year old. I was then living with my husband, Theodore Labitte, a mason; and it's not to brag that I say it, but however much I wore out my eyes with needlework he used to beat me till he left me half-dead on the floor. But he ended by deserting me and going off with a young woman of twenty, which, after all, caused me more pleasure than grief. And naturally when Salvat came back he sought me out and found me alone with his little Celine, whom he had left in my charge when he went away, and who called me mamma. And we've all three been living together since then – "

She became somewhat embarrassed, and then, as if to show that she did not altogether lack some respectable family connections, she went on to say: "For my part I've had no luck; but I've another sister, Hortense, who's married to a clerk, Monsieur Chretiennot, and lives in a pretty lodging on the Boulevard Rochechouart. There were three of us born of my father's second marriage, – Hortense, who's the youngest, Leonie, who's dead, and myself, Pauline, the eldest. And of my father's first marriage I've still a brother Eugene Toussaint, who is ten years older than me and is an engineer like Salvat, and has been working ever since the war in the same establishment, the Grandidier factory, only a hundred steps away in the Rue Marcadet. The misfortune is that he had a stroke lately. As for me, my eyes are done for; I ruined them by working ten hours a day at fine needlework. And now I can no longer even try to mend anything without my eyes filling with water till I can't see at all. I've tried to find charwoman's work, but I can't get any; bad luck always follows us. And so we are in need of everything; we've nothing but black misery, two or three days sometimes going by without a bite, so that it's like the chance life of a dog that feeds on what it can find. And with these last two months of bitter cold to freeze us, it's sometimes made us think that one morning we should never

wake up again. But what would you have? I've never been happy, I was beaten to begin with, and now I'm done for, left in a corner, living on, I really don't know why."

Her voice had begun to tremble, her red eyes moistened, and Pierre could realise that she thus wept through life, a good enough woman but one who had no will, and was already blotted out, so to say, from existence.

"Oh! I don't complain of Salvat," she went on. "He's a good fellow; he only dreams of everybody's happiness, and he doesn't drink, and he works when he can. Only it's certain that he'd work more if he didn't busy himself with politics. One can't discuss things with comrades, and go to public meetings and be at the workshop at the same time. In that he's at fault, that's evident. But all the same he has good reason to complain, for one can't imagine such misfortunes as have pursued him. Everything has fallen on him, everything has beaten him down. Why, a saint even would have gone mad, so that one can understand that a poor beggar who has never had any luck should get quite wild. For the last two months he has only met one good heart, a learned gentleman who lives up yonder on the height, Monsieur Guillaume Froment, who has given him a little work, just something to enable us to have some soup now and then."

Much surprised by this mention of his brother, Pierre wished to ask certain questions; but a singular feeling of uneasiness, in which fear and discretion mingled, checked his tongue. He looked at Celine, who stood before him, listening in silence with her grave, delicate air; and Madame Theodore, seeing him smile at the child, indulged in a final remark: "It's just the idea of that child," said she, "that throws Salvat out of his wits. He adores her, and he'd kill everybody if he could, when he sees her go supperless to bed. She's such a good girl, she was learning so nicely at the Communal School! But now she hasn't even a shift to go there in."

Pierre, who had at last written his address, slipped a five-franc piece into the little girl's hand, and, desirous as he was of curtailing any thanks, he hastily said: "You will know now where to find me if you need me for Laveuve. But I'm going to busy myself about him this very afternoon, and I really hope that he will be fetched away this evening."

Madame Theodore did not listen, but poured forth all possible blessings; whilst Celine, thunderstruck at seeing five francs in her hand, murmured: "Oh! that poor papa, who has gone to hunt for money! Shall I run after him to tell him that we've got enough for to-day?"

Then the priest, who was already in the passage, heard the woman answer: "Oh! he's far away if he's still walking. He'll p'raps come back right enough."

However, as Pierre, with buzzing head and grief-stricken heart, hastily escaped out of that frightful house of suffering, he perceived to his astonishment Salvat and Victor Mathis standing erect in a corner of the filthy courtyard, where the stench was so pestilential. They had come downstairs, there to continue their interrupted colloquy. And again, they were talking in very low tones, and very quickly, mouth to mouth, absorbed in the violent thoughts which made their eyes flare. But they heard the priest's footsteps, recognised him, and suddenly becoming cold and calm, exchanged an energetic hand-shake without uttering another word. Victor went up towards Montmartre, whilst Salvat hesitated like a man who is consulting destiny. Then, as if trusting himself to stern chance, drawing up his thin figure, the figure of a weary, hungry toiler, he turned into the Rue Marcadet, and walked towards Paris, his tool-bag still under his arm.

For an instant Pierre felt a desire to run and call to him that his little girl wished him to go back again. But the same feeling of uneasiness as before came over the priest – a commingling of discretion and fear, a covert conviction that nothing could stay destiny. And he himself was no longer calm, no longer experienced the icy, despairing distress of the early morning. On finding himself again in the street, amidst the quivering fog, he felt the fever, the glow of charity which the sight of such frightful wretchedness had ignited, once more within him. No, no! such suffering was too much; he wished to struggle still, to save Laveuve and restore a little joy to all those poor folk. The new experiment presented itself with that city of Paris which he had seen shrouded as with ashes,

so mysterious and so perturbing beneath the threat of inevitable justice. And he dreamed of a huge sun bringing health and fruitfulness, which would make of the huge city the fertile field where would sprout the better world of to-morrow.

II. WEALTH AND WORLDLINESS

THAT same morning, as was the case nearly every day, some intimates were expected to *dejeuner* at the Duvillards', a few friends who more or less invited themselves. And on that chilly day, all thaw and fog, the regal mansion in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy near the Boulevard de la Madeleine bloomed with the rarest flowers, for flowers were the greatest passion of the Baroness, who transformed the lofty, sumptuous rooms, littered with marvels, into warm and odoriferous conservatories, whither the gloomy, livid light of Paris penetrated caressingly with infinite softness.

The great reception rooms were on the ground-floor looking on to the spacious courtyard, and preceded by a little winter garden, which served as a vestibule where two footmen in liveries of dark green and gold were invariably on duty. A famous gallery of paintings, valued at millions of francs, occupied the whole of the northern side of the house. And the grand staircase, of a sumptuousness which also was famous, conducted to the apartments usually occupied by the family, a large red drawing-room, a small blue and silver drawing-room, a study whose walls were hung with old stamped leather, and a dining-room in pale green with English furniture, not to mention the various bedchambers and dressing-rooms. Built in the time of Louis XIV. the mansion retained an aspect of noble grandeur, subordinated to the epicurean tastes of the triumphant *bourgeoisie*, which for a century now had reigned by virtue of the omnipotence of money.

Noon had not yet struck, and Baron Duvillard, contrary to custom, found himself the first in the little blue and silver *salon*. He was a man of sixty, tall and sturdy, with a large nose, full cheeks, broad, fleshy lips, and wolfish teeth, which had remained very fine. He had, however, become bald at an early age, and dyed the little hair that was left him. Moreover, since his beard had turned white, he had kept his face clean-shaven. His grey eyes bespoke his audacity, and in his laugh there was a ring of conquest, while the whole of his face expressed the fact that this conquest was his own, that he wielded the sovereignty of an unscrupulous master, who used and abused the power stolen and retained by his caste.

He took a few steps, and then halted in front of a basket of wonderful orchids near the window. On the mantel-piece and table tufts of violets sent forth their perfume, and in the warm, deep silence which seemed to fall from the hangings, the Baron sat down and stretched himself in one of the large armchairs, upholstered in blue satin striped with silver. He had taken a newspaper from his pocket, and began to re-peruse an article it contained, whilst all around him the entire mansion proclaimed his immense fortune, his sovereign power, the whole history of the century which had made him the master. His grandfather, Jerome Duvillard, son of a petty advocate of Poitou, had come to Paris as a notary's clerk in 1788, when he was eighteen; and very keen, intelligent and hungry as he was, he had gained the family's first three millions – at first in trafficking with the *emigres"* estates when they were confiscated and sold as national property, and later, in contracting for supplies to the imperial army. His father, Gregoire Duvillard, born in 1805, and the real great man of the family – he who had first reigned in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy, after King Louis Philippe had granted him the title of Baron – remained one of the recognized heroes of modern finance by reason of the scandalous profits which he had made in every famous thieving speculation of the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, such as mines, railroads, and the Suez Canal. And he, the present Baron, Henri by name, and born in 1836, had only seriously gone into business on Baron Gregoire's death soon after the Franco-German War. However, he had done so with such a rageful appetite, that in a quarter of a century he had again doubled the family fortune. He rotted and devoured, corrupted, swallowed everything that he touched; and he was also the tempter personified – the man who bought all consciences that were for sale – having fully understood the new times and its tendencies in presence of the democracy, which in its turn had become hungry and impatient. Inferior though he was both to his father and his grandfather, being a man of enjoyment, caring less for the work of conquest than the division

of the spoil, he nevertheless remained a terrible fellow, a sleek triumpher, whose operations were all certainties, who amassed millions at each stroke, and treated with governments on a footing of equality, able as he was to place, if not France, at least a ministry in his pocket. In one century and three generations, royalty had become embodied in him: a royalty already threatened, already shaken by the tempest close ahead. And at times his figure grew and expanded till it became, as it were, an incarnation of the whole *bourgeoisie*– that *bourgeoisie* which at the division of the spoils in 1789 appropriated everything, and has since fattened on everything at the expense of the masses, and refuses to restore anything whatever.

The article which the Baron was re-perusing in a halfpenny newspaper interested him. "La Voix du Peuple" was a noisy sheet which, under the pretence of defending outraged justice and morality, set a fresh scandal circulating every morning in the hope of thereby increasing its sales. And that morning, in big type on its front page, this sub-title was displayed: "The Affair of the African Railways. Five Millions spent in Bribes: Two Ministers Bought, Thirty Deputies and Senators Compromised." Then in an article of odious violence the paper's editor, the famous Sagnier, announced that he possessed and intended to publish the list of the thirty-two members of Parliament, whose support Baron Duvillard had purchased at the time when the Chambers had voted the bill for the African Railway Lines. Quite a romantic story was mingled with all this, the adventures of a certain Hunter, whom the Baron had employed as his go-between and who had now fled. The Baron, however, re-perused each sentence and weighed each word of the article very calmly; and although he was alone he shrugged his shoulders and spoke aloud with the tranquil assurance of a man whose responsibility is covered and who is, moreover, too powerful to be molested.

"The idiot," he said, "he knows even less than he pretends."

Just then, however, a first guest arrived, a man of barely four and thirty, elegantly dressed, dark and good looking, with a delicately shaped nose, and curly hair and beard. As a rule, too, he had laughing eyes, and something giddy, flighty, bird-like in his demeanour; but that morning he seemed nervous, anxious even, and smiled in a scared way.

"Ah! it's you, Duthil," said the Baron, rising. "Have you read this?" And he showed the new comer the "Voix du Peuple," which he was folding up to replace it in his pocket.

"Why yes, I've read it. It's amazing. How can Sagnier have got hold of the list of names? Has there been some traitor?"

The Baron looked at his companion quietly, amused by his secret anguish. Duthil, the son of a notary of Angouleme, almost poor and very honest, had been sent to Paris as deputy for that town whilst yet very young, thanks to the high reputation of his father; and he there led a life of pleasure and idleness, even as he had formerly done when a student. However, his pleasant bachelor's quarters in the Rue de Suresnes, and his success as a handsome man in the whirl of women among whom he lived, cost him no little money; and gaily enough, devoid as he was of any moral sense, he had already glided into all sorts of compromising and lowering actions, like a light-headed, superior man, a charming, thoughtless fellow, who attached no importance whatever to such trifles.

"Bah!" said the Baron at last. "Has Sagnier even got a list? I doubt it, for there was none; Hunter wasn't so foolish as to draw one up. And then, too, it was merely an ordinary affair; nothing more was done than is always done in such matters of business."

Duthil, who for the first time in his life had felt anxious, listened like one that needs to be reassured. "Quite so, eh?" he exclaimed. "That's what I thought. There isn't a cat to be whipped in the whole affair."

He tried to laugh as usual, and no longer exactly knew how it was that he had received some ten thousand francs in connection with the matter, whether it were in the shape of a vague loan, or else under some pretext of publicity, puffery, or advertising, for Hunter had acted with extreme adroitness so as to give no offence to the susceptibilities of even the least virginal consciences.

"No, there's not a cat to be whipped," repeated Duvillard, who decidedly seemed amused by the face which Duthil was pulling. "And besides, my dear fellow, it's well known that cats always fall on their feet. But have you seen Silviane?"

"I just left her. I found her in a great rage with you. She learnt this morning that her affair of the Comedie is off."

A rush of anger suddenly reddened the Baron's face. He, who could scoff so calmly at the threat of the African Railways scandal, lost his balance and felt his blood boiling directly there was any question of Silviane, the last, imperious passion of his sixtieth year. "What! off?" said he. "But at the Ministry of Fine Arts they gave me almost a positive promise only the day before yesterday."

He referred to a stubborn caprice of Silviane d'Aulnay, who, although she had hitherto only reaped a success of beauty on the stage, obstinately sought to enter the Comedie Francaise and make her *debut* there in the part of "Pauline" in Corneille's "Polyeucte," which part she had been studying desperately for several months past. Her idea seemed an insane one, and all Paris laughed at it; but the young woman, with superb assurance, kept herself well to the front, and imperiously demanded the *role*, feeling sure that she would conquer.

"It was the minister who wouldn't have it," explained Duthil.

The Baron was choking. "The minister, the minister! Ah! well, I will soon have that minister sent to the rightabout."

However, he had to cease speaking, for at that moment Baroness Duvillard came into the little drawing-room. At forty-six years of age she was still very beautiful. Very fair and tall, having hitherto put on but little superfluous fat, and retaining perfect arms and shoulders, with speckless silky skin, it was only her face that was spoiling, colouring slightly with reddish blotches. And these blemishes were her torment, her hourly thought and worry. Her Jewish origin was revealed by her somewhat long and strangely charming face, with blue and softly voluptuous eyes. As indolent as an Oriental slave, disliking to have to move, walk, or even speak, she seemed intended for a harem life, especially as she was for ever tending her person. That day she was all in white, gowned in a white silk toilette of delicious and lustrous simplicity.

Duthil complimented her, and kissed her hand with an enraptured air. "Ah! madame, you set a little springtide in my heart. Paris is so black and muddy this morning."

However, a second guest entered the room, a tall and handsome man of five or six and thirty; and the Baron, still disturbed by his passion, profited by this opportunity to make his escape. He carried Duthil away into his study, saying, "Come here an instant, my dear fellow. I have a few more words to say to you about the affair in question. Monsieur de Quinsac will keep my wife company for a moment."

The Baroness, as soon as she was alone with the new comer, who, like Duthil, had most respectfully kissed her hand, gave him a long, silent look, while her soft eyes filled with tears. Deep silence, tinged with some slight embarrassment, had fallen, but she ended by saying in a very low voice: "How happy I am, Gerard, to find myself alone with you for a moment. For a month past I have not had that happiness."

The circumstances in which Henri Duvillard had married the younger daughter of Justus Steinberger, the great Jew banker, formed quite a story which was often recalled. The Steinbergers – after the fashion of the Rothschilds – were originally four brothers – Justus, residing in Paris, and the three others at Berlin, Vienna, and London, a circumstance which gave their secret association most formidable power in the financial markets of Europe. Justus, however, was the least wealthy of the four, and in Baron Gregoire Duvillard he had a redoubtable adversary against whom he was compelled to struggle each time that any large prey was in question. And it was after a terrible encounter between the pair, after the eager sharing of the spoils, that the crafty idea had come to Justus of giving his younger daughter Eve in marriage, by way of *douceur*, to the Baron's son, Henri. So far the latter had only been known as an amiable fellow, fond of horses and club life; and no doubt Justus's idea

was that, at the death of the redoubtable Baron, who was already condemned by his physicians, he would be able to lay his hands on the rival banking-house, particularly if he only had in front of him a son-in-law whom it was easy to conquer. As it happened, Henri had been mastered by a violent passion for Eve's blond beauty, which was then dazzling. He wished to marry her, and his father, who knew him, consented, in reality greatly amused to think that Justus was making an execrably bad stroke of business. The enterprise became indeed disastrous for Justus when Henri succeeded his father and the man of prey appeared from beneath the man of pleasure and carved himself his own huge share in exploiting the unbridled appetites of the middle-class democracy, which had at last secured possession of power. Not only did Eve fail to devour Henri, who in his turn had become Baron Duvillard, the all-powerful banker, more and more master of the market; but it was the Baron who devoured Eve, and this in less than four years' time. After she had borne him a daughter and a son in turn, he suddenly drew away from her, neglected her, as if she were a mere toy that he no longer cared for. She was at first both surprised and distressed by the change, especially on learning that he was resuming his bachelor's habits, and had set his fickle if ardent affections elsewhere. Then, however, without any kind of recrimination, any display of anger, or even any particular effort to regain her ascendency over him, she, on her side, imitated his example. She could not live without love, and assuredly she had only been born to be beautiful, to fascinate and reap adoration. To the lover whom she chose when she was five and twenty she remained faithful for more than fifteen years, as faithful as she might have been to a husband; and when he died her grief was intense, it was like real widowhood. Six months later, however, having met Count Gerard de Quinsac she had again been unable to resist her imperative need of adoration, and an intrigue had followed.

"Have you been ill, my dear Gerard?" she inquired, noticing the young man's embarrassment. "Are you hiding some worry from me?"

She was ten years older than he was; and she clung desperately to this last passion of hers, revolting at the thought of growing old, and resolved upon every effort to keep the young man beside her.

"No, I am hiding nothing, I assure you," replied the Count. "But my mother has had much need of me recently."

She continued looking at him, however, with anxious passion, finding him so tall and aristocratic of mien, with his regular features and dark hair and moustaches which were always most carefully tended. He belonged to one of the oldest families of France, and resided on a ground-floor in the Rue St. Dominique with his widowed mother, who had been ruined by her adventurously inclined husband, and had at most an income of some fifteen thousand francs[1] to live upon. Gerard for his part had never done anything; contenting himself with his one year of obligatory military service, he had renounced the profession of arms in the same way as he had renounced that of diplomacy, the only one that offered him an opening of any dignity. He spent his days in that busy idleness common to all young men who lead "Paris life." And his mother, haughtily severe though she was, seemed to excuse this, as if in her opinion a man of his birth was bound by way of protest to keep apart from official life under a Republic. However, she no doubt had more intimate, more disturbing reasons for indulgence. She had nearly lost him when he was only seven, through an attack of brain fever. At eighteen he had complained of his heart, and the doctors had recommended that he should be treated gently in all respects. She knew, therefore, what a lie lurked behind his proud demeanour, within his lofty figure, that haughty *facade* of his race. He was but dust, ever threatened with illness and collapse. In the depths of his seeming virility there was merely girlish *abandon*; and he was simply a weak, good-natured fellow, liable to every stumble. It was on the occasion of a visit which he had paid with his mother to the Asylum of the Invalids of Labour that he had first seen Eve, whom he continued to meet; his mother, closing her eyes to this culpable connection in a sphere of society which she treated

[1] About 3000 dollars.

with contempt, in the same way as she had closed them to so many other acts of folly which she had forgiven because she regarded them as the mere lapses of an ailing child. Moreover, Eve had made a conquest of Madame de Quinsac, who was very pious, by an action which had recently amazed society. It had been suddenly learnt that she had allowed Monseigneur Martha to convert her to the Roman Catholic faith. This thing, which she had refused to do when solicited by her lawful husband, she had now done in the hope of ensuring herself a lover's eternal affection. And all Paris was still stirred by the magnificence exhibited at the Madeleine, on the occasion of the baptism of this Jewess of five and forty, whose beauty and whose tears had upset every heart.

Gerard, on his side, was still flattered by the deep and touching tenderness shown to him; but weariness was coming, and he had already sought to break off the connection by avoiding any further assignations. He well understood Eve's glances and her tears, and though he was moved at sight of them he tried to excuse himself. "I assure you," said he, "my mother has kept me so busy that I could not get away." But she, without a word, still turned her tearful glance on him, and weak, like herself, in despair that he should have been left alone with her in this fashion, he yielded, unable to continue refusing. "Well, then," said he, "this afternoon at four o'clock if you are free."

He had lowered his voice in speaking, but a slight rustle made him turn his head and start like one in fault. It was the Baroness's daughter Camille entering the room. She had heard nothing; but by the smile which the others had exchanged, by the very quiver of the air, she understood everything; an assignation for that very day and at the very spot which she suspected. Some slight embarrassment followed, an exchange of anxious and evil glances.

Camille, at three and twenty, was a very dark young woman, short of stature and somewhat deformed, with her left shoulder higher than the right. There seemed to be nothing of her father or mother in her. Her case was one of those unforeseen accidents in family heredity which make people wonder whence they can arise. Her only pride lay in her beautiful black eyes and superb black hair, which, short as she was, would, said she, have sufficed to clothe her. But her nose was long, her face deviated to the left, and her chin was pointed. Her thin, witty, and malicious lips bespoke all the rancour and perverse anger stored in the heart of this uncomely creature, whom the thought of her uncomeliness enraged. However, the one whom she most hated in the whole world was her own mother, that *amorosa* who was so little fitted to be a mother, who had never loved her, never paid attention to her, but had abandoned her to the care of servants from her very infancy. In this wise real hatred had grown up between the two women, mute and frigid on the one side, and active and passionate on the other. The daughter hated her mother because she found her beautiful, because she had not been created in the same image: beautiful with the beauty with which her mother crushed her. Day by day she suffered at being sought by none, at realising that the adoration of one and all still went to her mother. As she was amusing in her maliciousness, people listened to her and laughed; however, the glances of all the men – even and indeed especially the younger ones – soon reverted to her triumphant mother, who seemingly defied old age. In part for this reason Camille, with ferocious determination, had decided that she would dispossess her mother of her last lover Gerard, and marry him herself, conscious that such a loss would doubtless kill the Baroness. Thanks to her promised dowry of five millions of francs, the young woman did not lack suitors; but, little flattered by their advances, she was accustomed to say, with her malicious laugh: "Oh! of course; why for five millions they would take a wife from a mad-house." However, she, herself, had really begun to love Gerard, who, good-natured as he was, evinced much kindness towards this suffering young woman whom nature had treated so harshly. It worried him to see her forsaken by everyone, and little by little he yielded to the grateful tenderness which she displayed towards him, happy, handsome man that he was, at being regarded as a demi-god and having such a slave. Indeed, in his attempt to quit the mother there was certainly a thought of allowing the daughter to marry him, which would be an agreeable ending to it all, though he did not as yet acknowledge this, ashamed as he felt and embarrassed by his illustrious name and all the complications and tears which he foresaw.

The silence continued. Camille with her piercing glance, as sharp as any knife, had told her mother that she knew the truth; and then with another and pain-fraught glance she had complained to Gerard. He, in order to re-establish equilibrium, could only think of a compliment: “Good morning, Camille. Ah! that havana-brown gown of yours looks nice! It’s astonishing how well rather sombre colours suit you.”

Camille glanced at her mother’s white robe, and then at her own dark gown, which scarcely allowed her neck and wrists to be seen. “Yes,” she replied laughing, “I only look passable when I don’t dress as a young girl.”

Eve, ill at ease, worried by the growth of a rivalry in which she did not as yet wish to believe, changed the conversation. “Isn’t your brother there?” she asked.

“Why yes, we came down together.”

Hyacinthe, who came in at that moment, shook hands with Gerard in a weary way. He was twenty, and had inherited his mother’s pale blond hair, and her long face full of Oriental languor; while from his father he had derived his grey eyes and thick lips, expressive of unscrupulous appetites. A wretched scholar, regarding every profession with the same contempt, he had decided to do nothing. Spoilt by his father, he took some little interest in poetry and music, and lived in an extraordinary circle of artists, low women, madmen and bandits; boasting himself of all sorts of crimes and vices, professing the very worst philosophical and social ideas, invariably going to extremes, becoming in turn a Collectivist, an Individualist, an Anarchist, a Pessimist, a Symbolist, and what not besides; without, however, ceasing to be a Catholic, as this conjunction of Catholicity with something else seemed to him the supreme *bon ton*. In reality he was simply empty and rather a fool. In four generations the vigorous hungry blood of the Duvillards, after producing three magnificent beasts of prey, had, as if exhausted by the contentment of every passion, ended in this sorry emasculated creature, who was incapable alike of great knavery or great debauchery.

Camille, who was too intelligent not to realise her brother’s nothingness, was fond of teasing him; and looking at him as he stood there, tightly buttoned in his long frock coat with pleated skirt – a resurrection of the romantic period, which he carried to exaggeration, she resumed: “Mamma has been asking for you, Hyacinthe. Come and show her your gown. You are the one who would look nice dressed as a young girl.”

However, he eluded her without replying. He was covertly afraid of her, though they lived together in great intimacy, frankly exchanging confidences respecting their perverse views of life. And he directed a glance of disdain at the wonderful basket of orchids which seemed to him past the fashion, far too common nowadays. For his part he had left the lilies of life behind him, and reached the ranunculus, the flower of blood.

The two last guests who were expected now arrived almost together. The first was the investigating magistrate Amadieu, a little man of five and forty, who was an intimate of the household and had been brought into notoriety by a recent anarchist affair. Between a pair of fair, bushy whiskers he displayed a flat, regular judicial face, to which he tried to impart an expression of keenness by wearing a single eyeglass behind which his glance sparkled. Very worldly, moreover, he belonged to the new judicial school, being a distinguished psychologist and having written a book in reply to the abuses of criminalist physiology. And he was also a man of great, tenacious ambition, fond of notoriety and ever on the lookout for those resounding legal affairs which bring glory. Behind him, at last appeared General de Bozonnet, Gerard’s uncle on the maternal side, a tall, lean old man with a nose like an eagle’s beak. Chronic rheumatism had recently compelled him to retire from the service. Raised to a colonelcy after the Franco-German War in reward for his gallant conduct at St. Privat, he had, in spite of his extremely monarchical connections, kept his sworn faith to Napoleon III. And he was excused in his own sphere of society for this species of military Bonapartism, on account of the bitterness with which he accused the Republic of having ruined the army. Worthy fellow that he was, extremely fond of his sister, Madame de Quinsac, it seemed as though he acted in accordance with

some secret desire of hers in accepting the invitations of Baroness Duvillard by way of rendering Gerard's constant presence in her house more natural and excusable.

However, the Baron and Duthil now returned from the study, laughing loudly in an exaggerated way, doubtless to make the others believe that they were quite easy in mind. And one and all passed into the large dining-room where a big wood fire was burning, its gay flames shining like a ray of springtide amid the fine mahogany furniture of English make laden with silver and crystal. The room, of a soft mossy green, had an unassuming charm in the pale light, and the table which in the centre displayed the richness of its covers and the immaculate whiteness of its linen adorned with Venetian point, seemed to have flowered miraculously with a wealth of large tea roses, most admirable blooms for the season, and of delicious perfume.

The Baroness seated the General on her right, and Amadieu on her left. The Baron on his right placed Duthil, and on his left Gerard. Then the young people installed themselves at either end, Camille between Gerard and the General, and Hyacinthe between Duthil and Amadieu. And forthwith, from the moment of starting on the scrambled eggs and truffles, conversation began, the usual conversation of Parisian *dejeuners*, when every event, great or little, of the morning or the day before is passed in review: the truths and the falsehoods current in every social sphere, the financial scandal, and the political adventure of the hour, the novel that has just appeared, the play that has just been produced, the stories which should only be retailed in whispers, but which are repeated aloud. And beneath all the light wit which circulates, beneath all the laughter, which often has a false ring, each retains his or her particular worry, or distress of mind, at times so acute that it becomes perfect agony.

With his quiet and wonted impudence, the Baron, bravely enough, was the first to speak of the article in the "Voix du Peuple." "I say, have you read Sagnier's article this morning? It's a good one; he has *verve* you know, but what a dangerous lunatic he is!"

This set everybody at ease, for the article would certainly have weighed upon the *dejeuner* had no one mentioned it.

"It's the 'Panama' dodge over again!" cried Duthil. "But no, no, we've had quite enough of it!"

"Why," resumed the Baron, "the affair of the African Railway Lines is as clear as spring water! All those whom Sagnier threatens may sleep in peace. The truth is that it's a scheme to upset Barroux's ministry. Leave to interpellate will certainly be asked for this afternoon. You'll see what a fine uproar there'll be in the Chamber."

"That libellous, scandal-seeking press," said Amadieu gravely, "is a dissolving agent which will bring France to ruin. We ought to have laws against it."

The General made an angry gesture: "Laws, what's the use of them, since nobody has the courage to enforce them."

Silence fell. With a light, discreet step the house-steward presented some grilled mullet. So noiseless was the service amid the cheerful perfumed warmth that not even the faintest clatter of crockery was heard. Without anyone knowing how it had come about, however, the conversation had suddenly changed; and somebody inquired: "So the revival of the piece is postponed?"

"Yes," said Gerard, "I heard this morning that 'Polyeucte' wouldn't get its turn till April at the earliest."

At this Camille, who had hitherto remained silent, watching the young Count and seeking to win him back, turned her glittering eyes upon her father and mother. It was a question of that revival in which Silviane was so stubbornly determined to make her *debut*. However, the Baron and the Baroness evinced perfect serenity, having long been acquainted with all that concerned each other. Moreover Eve was too much occupied with her own passion to think of anything else; and the Baron too busy with the fresh application which he intended to make in tempestuous fashion at the Ministry of Fine Arts, so as to wrest Silviane's engagement from those in office. He contented himself with saying: "How would you have them revive pieces at the Comedie! They have no actresses left there."

"Oh, by the way," the Baroness on her side simply remarked, "yesterday, in that play at the Vaudeville, Delphine Vignot wore such an exquisite gown. She's the only one too who knows how to arrange her hair."

Thereupon Duthil, in somewhat veiled language, began to relate a story about Delphine and a well-known senator. And then came another scandal, the sudden and almost suspicious death of a lady friend of the Duvillards'; whereupon the General, without any transition, broke in to relieve his bitter feelings by denouncing the idiotic manner in which the army was nowadays organised. Meantime the old Bordeaux glittered like ruby blood in the delicate crystal glasses. A truffled fillet of venison had just cast its somewhat sharp scent amidst the dying perfume of the roses, when some asparagus made its appearance, a *primeur* which once had been so rare but which no longer caused any astonishment.

"Nowadays we get it all through the winter," said the Baron with a gesture of disenchantment.

"And so," asked Gerard at the same moment, "the Princess de Harn's *matinee* is for this afternoon?"

Camille quickly intervened. "Yes, this afternoon. Shall you go?"

"No, I don't think so, I shan't be able," replied the young man in embarrassment.

"Ah! that little Princess, she's really deranged you know," exclaimed Duthil. "You are aware that she calls herself a widow? But the truth, it seems, is that her husband, a real Prince, connected with a royal house and very handsome, is travelling about the world in the company of a singer. She with her vicious urchin-like face preferred to come and reign in Paris, in that mansion of the Avenue Hoche, which is certainly the most extraordinary Noah's ark imaginable, with its swarming of cosmopolitan society indulging in every extravagance!"

"Be quiet, you malicious fellow," the Baroness gently interrupted. "We, here, are very fond of Rosemonde, who is a charming woman."

"Oh! certainly," Camille again resumed. "She invited us; and we are going to her place by-and-by, are we not, mamma?"

To avoid replying, the Baroness pretended that she did not hear, whilst Duthil, who seemed to be well-informed concerning the Princess, continued to make merry over her intended *matinee*, at which she meant to produce some Spanish dancing girls, whose performance was so very indecorous that all Paris, forewarned of the circumstance, would certainly swarm to her house. And he added: "You've heard that she has given up painting. Yes, she busies herself with chemistry. Her *salon* is full of Anarchists now – and, by the way, it seemed to me that she had cast her eyes on you, my dear Hyacinthe."

Hyacinthe had hitherto held his tongue, as if he took no interest in anything. "Oh! she bores me to death," he now condescended to reply. "If I'm going to her *matinee* it's simply in the hope of meeting my friend young Lord George Eldrett, who wrote to me from London to give me an appointment at the Princess's. And I admit that hers is the only *salon* where I find somebody to talk to."

"And so," asked Amadieu in an ironical way, "you have now gone over to Anarchism?"

With his air of lofty elegance Hyacinthe imperturbably confessed his creed: "But it seems to me, monsieur, that in these times of universal baseness and ignominy, no man of any distinction can be other than an Anarchist."

A laugh ran round the table. Hyacinthe was very much spoilt, and considered very entertaining. His father in particular was immensely amused by the notion that he of all men should have an Anarchist for a son. However, the General, in his rancorous moments, talked anarchically enough of blowing up a society which was so stupid as to let itself be led by half a dozen disreputable characters. And, indeed, the investigating magistrate, who was gradually making a specialty of Anarchist affairs, proved the only one who opposed the young man, defending threatened civilisation and giving terrifying particulars concerning what he called the army of devastation and massacre. The others, while partaking of some delicious duck's-liver *pate*, which the house-steward handed around, continued smiling. There was so much misery, said they; one must take everything into account:

things would surely end by righting themselves. And the Baron himself declared, in a conciliatory manner: “It’s certain that one might do something, though nobody knows exactly what. As for all sensible and moderate claims, oh! I agree to them in advance. For instance, the lot of the working classes may be ameliorated, charitable enterprises may be undertaken, such, for instance, as our Asylum for the Invalids of Labour, which we have reason to be proud of. But we must not be asked for impossibilities.”

With the dessert came a sudden spell of silence; it was as if, amidst the restless fluttering of the conversation, and the dizziness born of the copious meal, each one’s worry or distress was again wringing the heart and setting an expression of perturbation on the countenance. The nervous unconscientiousness of Duthil, threatened with denunciation, was seen to revive; so, too, the anxious anger of the Baron, who was meditating how he might possibly manage to content Silviane. That woman was this sturdy, powerful man’s taint, the secret sore which would perhaps end by eating him away and destroying him. But it was the frightful drama in which the Baroness, Camille and Gerard were concerned that flitted by most visibly across the faces of all three of them: that hateful rivalry of mother and daughter, contending for the man they loved. And, meantime, the silver-gilt blades of the dessert-knives were delicately peeling choice fruit. And there were bunches of golden grapes looking beautifully fresh, and a procession of sweetmeats, little cakes, an infinity of dainties, over which the most satiated appetites lingered complacently.

Then, just as the finger-glasses were being served, a footman came and bent over the Baroness, who answered in an undertone, “Well, show him into the *salon*, I will join him there.” And aloud to the others she added: “It’s Monsieur l’Abbe Froment, who has called and asks most particularly to see me. He won’t be in our way; I think that almost all of you know him. Oh! he’s a genuine saint, and I have much sympathy for him.”

For a few minutes longer they loitered round the table, and then at last quitted the dining-room, which was full of the odours of viands, wines, fruits and roses; quite warm, too, with the heat thrown out by the big logs of firewood, which were falling into embers amidst the somewhat jumbled brightness of all the crystal and silver, and the pale, delicate light which fell upon the disorderly table.

Pierre had remained standing in the centre of the little blue and silver *salon*. Seeing a tray on which the coffee and the liqueurs were in readiness, he regretted that he had insisted upon being received. And his embarrassment increased when the company came in rather noisily, with bright eyes and rosy cheeks. However, his charitable fervour had revived so ardently within him that he overcame this embarrassment, and all that remained to him of it was a slight feeling of discomfort at bringing the whole frightful morning which he had just spent amid such scenes of wretchedness, so much darkness and cold, so much filth and hunger, into this bright, warm, perfumed affluence, where the useless and the superfluous overflowed around those folks who seemed so gay at having made a delightful meal.

However, the Baroness at once came forward with Gerard, for it was through the latter, whose mother he knew, that the priest had been presented to the Duvillards at the time of the famous conversion. And as he apologised for having called at such an inconvenient hour, the Baroness responded: “But you are always welcome, Monsieur l’Abbe. You will allow me just to attend to my guests, won’t you? I will be with you in an instant.”

She thereupon returned to the table on which the tray had been placed, in order to serve the coffee and the liqueurs, with her daughter’s assistance. Gerard, however, remained with Pierre; and, it so chanced, began to speak to him of the Asylum for the Invalids of Labour, where they had met one another at the recent laying of the foundation-stone of a new pavilion which was being erected, thanks to a handsome donation of 100,000 francs made by Baron Duvillard. So far, the enterprise only comprised four pavilions out of the fourteen which it was proposed to erect on the vast site

given by the City of Paris on the peninsula of Gennevilliers[2]; and so the subscription fund remained open, and, indeed, no little noise was made over this charitable enterprise, which was regarded as a complete and peremptory reply to the accusations of those evilly disposed persons who charged the satiated *bourgeoisie* with doing nothing for the workers. But the truth was that a magnificent chapel, erected in the centre of the site, had absorbed two-thirds of the funds hitherto collected. Numerous lady patronesses, chosen from all the "worlds" of Paris – the Baroness Duvillard, the Countess de Quinsac, the Princess Rosemonde de Harn, and a score of others – were entrusted with the task of keeping the enterprise alive by dint of collections and fancy bazaars. But success had been chiefly obtained, thanks to the happy idea of ridding the ladies of all the weighty cares of organisation, by choosing as managing director a certain Fonsegue, who, besides being a deputy and editor of the "Globe" newspaper, was a prodigious promoter of all sorts of enterprises. And the "Globe" never paused in its propaganda, but answered the attacks of the revolutionaries by extolling the inexhaustible charity of the governing classes in such wise that, at the last elections, the enterprise had served as a victorious electoral weapon.

However, Camille was walking about with a steaming cup of coffee in her hand: "Will you take some coffee, Monsieur l'Abbe?" she inquired.

"No, thank you, mademoiselle."

"A glass of Chartreuse then?"

"No, thank you."

Then everybody being served, the Baroness came back and said amiably: "Come, Monsieur l'Abbe, what do you desire of me?"

Pierre began to speak almost in an undertone, his throat contracting and his heart beating with emotion. "I have come, madame, to appeal to your great kindness of heart. This morning, in a frightful house, in the Rue des Saules, behind Montmartre, I beheld a sight which utterly upset me. You can have no idea what an abode of misery and suffering it was; its inmates without fire or bread, the men reduced to idleness because there is no work, the mothers having no more milk for their babes, the children barely clad, coughing and shivering. And among all these horrors I saw the worst, the most abominable of all, an old workman, laid on his back by age, dying of hunger, huddled on a heap of rags, in a nook which a dog would not even accept as kennel."

He tried to recount things as discreetly as possible, frightened by the very words he spoke, the horrors he had to relate in that sphere of superlative luxury and enjoyment, before those happy ones who possessed all the gifts of this world; for – to use a slang expression – he fully realised that he sang out of tune, and in most uncourteous fashion. What a strange idea of his to have called at the hour when one has just finished *dejeuner*, when the aroma of hot coffee flatters happy digestion. Nevertheless he went on, and even ended by raising his voice, yielding to the feeling of revolt which gradually stirred him, going to the end of his terrible narrative, naming Laveuve, insisting on the unjust abandonment in which the old man was left, and asking for succour in the name of human compassion. And the whole company approached to listen to him; he could see the Baron and the General, and Duthil and Amadieu, in front of him, sipping their coffee, in silence, without a gesture.

"Well, madame," he concluded, "it seemed to me that one could not leave that old man an hour longer in such a frightful position, and that this very evening you would have the extreme goodness to have him admitted into the Asylum of the Invalids of Labour, which is, I think, the proper and only place for him."

Tears had moistened Eve's beautiful eyes. She was in consternation at so sad a story coming to her to spoil her afternoon when she was looking forward to her assignation with Gerard. Weak and indolent as she was, lacking all initiative, too much occupied moreover with her own person, she had only accepted the presidency of the Committee on the condition that all administrative worries

[2] This so-called peninsula lies to the northwest of Paris, and is formed by the windings of the Seine. – Trans.

were to fall on Fonsegue. “Ah! Monsieur l’Abbe,” she murmured, “you rend my heart. But I can do nothing, nothing at all, I assure you. Moreover, I believe that we have already inquired into the affair of that man Laveuve. With us, you know, there must be the most serious guarantees with regard to every admission. A reporter is chosen who has to give us full information. Wasn’t it you, Monsieur Duthil, who was charged with this man Laveuve’s affair?”

The deputy was finishing a glass of Chartreuse. “Yes, it was I. That fine fellow played you a comedy, Monsieur l’Abbe. He isn’t at all ill, and if you left him any money you may be sure he went down to drink it as soon as you were gone. For he is always drunk; and, besides that, he has the most hateful disposition imaginable, crying out from morning till evening against the *bourgeois*, and saying that if he had any strength left in his arms he would undertake to blow up the whole show. And, moreover, he won’t go into the asylum; he says that it’s a real prison where one’s guarded by Beguins who force one to hear mass, a dirty convent where the gates are shut at nine in the evening! And there are so many of them like that, who rather than be succoured prefer their liberty, with cold and hunger and death. Well then, let the Laveuves die in the street, since they refuse to be with us, and be warm and eat in our asylums!”

The General and Amadieu nodded their heads approvingly. But Duvillard showed himself more generous. “No, no, indeed! A man’s a man after all, and should be succoured in spite of himself.”

Eve, however, in despair at the idea that she would be robbed of her afternoon, struggled and sought for reasons. “I assure you that my hands are altogether tied. Monsieur l’Abbe does not doubt my heart or my zeal. But how call I possibly assemble the Committee without a few days’ delay? And I have particular reasons for coming to no decision, especially in an affair which has already been inquired into and pronounced upon, without the Committee’s sanction.” Then, all at once she found a solution: “What I advise you to do, Monsieur l’Abbe, is to go at once to see Monsieur Fonsegue, our managing director. He alone can act in an urgent case, for he knows that the ladies have unlimited confidence in him and approve everything he does.”

“You will find Fonsegue at the Chamber,” added Duthil smiling, “only the sitting will be a warm one, and I doubt whether you will be able to have a comfortable chat with him.”

Pierre, whose heart had contracted yet more painfully, insisted on the subject no further; but at once made up his mind to see Fonsegue, and in any event obtain from him a promise that the wretched Laveuve should be admitted to the Asylum that very evening. Then he lingered in the saloon for a few minutes listening to Gerard, who obligingly pointed out to him how he might best convince the deputy, which was by alleging how bad an effect such a story could have, should it be brought to light by the revolutionary newspapers. However, the guests were beginning to take their leave. The General, as he went off, came to ask his nephew if he should see him that afternoon at his mother’s, Madame de Quinsac, whose “day” it was: a question which the young man answered with an evasive gesture when he noticed that both Eve and Camille were looking at him. Then came the turn of Amadieu, who hurried off saying that a serious affair required his presence at the Palace of Justice. And Duthil soon followed him in order to repair to the Chamber.

“I’ll see you between four and five at Silviane’s, eh?” said the Baron as he conducted him to the door. “Come and tell me what occurs at the Chamber in consequence of that odious article of Sagnier’s. I must at all events know. For my part I shall go to the Ministry of Fine Arts, to settle that affair of the Comedie; and besides I’ve some calls to make, some contractors to see, and a big launching and advertisement affair to settle.”

“It’s understood then, between four and five, at Silviane’s,” said the deputy, who went off again mastered by his vague uneasiness, his anxiety as to what turn that nasty affair of the African Railway Lines might take.

And all of them had forgotten Laveuve, the miserable wretch who lay at death’s door; and all of them were hastening away to their business or their passions, caught in the toils, sinking under the grindstone and whisked away by that rush of all Paris, whose fever bore them along, throwing

one against another in an ardent scramble, in which the sole question was who should pass over the others and crush them.

"And so, mamma," said Camille, who continued to scrutinise her mother and Gerard, "you are going to take us to the Princess's *matinee*?"

"By-and-by, yes. Only I shan't be able to stay there with you. I received a telegram from Salmon about my corsage this morning, and I must absolutely go to try it on at four o'clock."

By the slight trembling of her mother's voice, the girl felt certain that she was telling a falsehood. "Oh!" said she, "I thought you were only going to try it on to-morrow? In that case I suppose we are to go and call for you at Salmon's with the carriage on leaving the *matinee*?"

"Oh! no my dear! One never knows when one will be free; and besides, if I have a moment, I shall call at the *modiste's*."

Camille's secret rage brought almost a murderous glare to her dark eyes. The truth was evident. But however passionately she might desire to set some obstacle across her mother's path, she could not, dared not, carry matters any further. In vain had she attempted to implore Gerard with her eyes. He was standing to take his leave, and turned away his eyes. Pierre, who had become acquainted with many things since he had frequented the house, noticed how all three of them quivered, and divined thereby the mute and terrible drama.

At this moment, however, Hyacinthe, stretched in an armchair, and munching an ether capsule, the only liqueur in which he indulged, raised his voice: "For my part, you know, I'm going to the Exposition du Lis. All Paris is swarming there. There's one painting in particular, 'The Rape of a Soul,' which it's absolutely necessary for one to have seen."

"Well, but I don't refuse to drive you there," resumed the Baroness. "Before going to the Princess's we can look in at that exhibition."

"That's it, that's it," hastily exclaimed Camille, who, though she harshly derided the symbolist painters as a rule, now doubtless desired to delay her mother. Then, forcing herself to smile, she asked: "Won't you risk a look-in at the Exposition du Lis with us, Monsieur Gerard?"

"Well, no," replied the Count, "I want to walk. I shall go with Monsieur l'Abbe Froment to the Chamber."

Thereupon he took leave of mother and daughter, kissing the hand of each in turn. It had just occurred to him that to while away his time he also might call for a moment at Silviane's, where, like the others, he had his *entrees*. On reaching the cold and solemn courtyard he said to the priest, "Ah! it does one good to breathe a little cool air. They keep their rooms too hot, and all those flowers, too, give one the headache."

Pierre for his part was going off with his brain in a whirl, his hands feverish, his senses oppressed by all the luxury which he left behind him, like the dream of some glowing, perfumed paradise where only the elect had their abode. At the same time his reviving thirst for charity had become keener than ever, and without listening to the Count, who was speaking very affectionately of his mother, he reflected as to how he might obtain Laveuve's admission to the Asylum from Fonsegue. However, when the door of the mansion had closed behind them and they had taken a few steps along the street, it occurred to Pierre that a moment previously a sudden vision had met his gaze. Had he not seen a workman carrying a tool-bag, standing and waiting on the foot pavement across the road, gazing at that monumental door, closed upon so much fabulous wealth – a workman in whom he fancied he had recognised Salvat, that hungry fellow who had gone off that morning in search of work? At this thought Pierre hastily turned round. Such wretchedness in face of so much affluence and enjoyment made him feel anxious. But the workman, disturbed in his contemplation, and possibly fearing that he had been recognised, was going off with dragging step. And now, getting only a back view of him, Pierre hesitated, and ended by thinking that he must have been mistaken.

III. RANTERS AND RULERS

WHEN Abbe Froment was about to enter the Palais-Bourbon he remembered that he had no card, and he was making up his mind that he would simply ask for Fonsegue, though he was not known to him, when, on reaching the vestibule, he perceived Mege, the Collectivist deputy, with whom he had become acquainted in his days of militant charity in the poverty-stricken Charonne district.

"What, you here? You surely have not come to evangelise us?" said Mege.

"No, I've come to see Monsieur Fonsegue on an urgent matter, about a poor fellow who cannot wait."

"Fonsegue? I don't know if he has arrived. Wait a moment." And stopping a short, dark young fellow with a ferreting, mouse-like air, Mege said to him: "Massot, here's Monsieur l'Abbe Froment, who wants to speak to your governor at once."

"The governor? But he isn't here. I left him at the office of the paper, where he'll be detained for another quarter of an hour. However, if Monsieur l'Abbe likes to wait he will surely see him here."

Thereupon Mege ushered Pierre into the large waiting-hall, the Salle des Pas Perdus, which in other moments looked so vast and cold with its bronze Minerva and Laocoon, and its bare walls on which the pale mournful winter light fell from the glass doors communicating with the garden. Just then, however, it was crowded, and warmed, as it were, by the feverish agitation of the many groups of men that had gathered here and there, and the constant coming and going of those who hastened through the throng. Most of these were deputies, but there were also numerous journalists and inquisitive visitors. And a growing uproar prevailed: colloquies now in undertones, now in loud voices, exclamations and bursts of laughter, amidst a deal of passionate gesticulation, Mege's return into the tumult seemed to fan it. He was tall, apostolically thin, and somewhat neglectful of his person, looking already old and worn for his age, which was but five and forty, though his eyes still glowed with youth behind the glasses which never left his beak-like nose. And he had a warm but grating voice, and had always been known to cough, living on solely because he was bitterly intent on doing so in order to realise the dream of social re-organisation which haunted him. The son of an impoverished medical man of a northern town, he had come to Paris when very young, living there during the Empire on petty newspaper and other unknown work, and first making a reputation as an orator at the public meetings of the time. Then, after the war, having become the chief of the Collectivist party, thanks to his ardent faith and the extraordinary activity of his fighting nature, he had at last managed to enter the Chamber, where, brimful of information, he fought for his ideas with fierce determination and obstinacy, like a *doctrinaire* who has decided in his own mind what the world ought to be, and who regulates in advance, and bit by bit, the whole dogma of Collectivism. However, since he had taken pay as a deputy, the outside Socialists had looked upon him as a mere rhetorician, an aspiring dictator who only tried to cast society in a new mould for the purpose of subordinating it to his personal views and ruling it.

"You know what is going on?" he said to Pierre. "This is another nice affair, is it not? But what would you have? We are in mud to our very ears."

He had formerly conceived genuine sympathy for the priest, whom he had found so gentle with all who suffered, and so desirous of social regeneration. And the priest himself had ended by taking an interest in this authoritarian dreamer, who was resolved to make men happy in spite even of themselves. He knew that he was poor, and led a retired life with his wife and four children, to whom he was devoted.

"You can well understand that I am no ally of Sagnier's," Mege resumed. "But as he chose to speak out this morning and threaten to publish the names of all those who have taken bribes, we can't allow ourselves to pass as accomplices any further. It has long been said that there was some nasty jobbery in that suspicious affair of the African railways. And the worst is that two members of

the present Cabinet are in question, for three years ago, when the Chambers dealt with Duvillard's emission, Barroux was at the Home Department, and Monferrand at that of Public Works. Now that they have come back again, Monferrand at the Home Department, and Barroux at that of Finance, with the Presidency of the Council, it isn't possible, is it, for us to do otherwise than compel them to enlighten us, in their own interest even, about their former goings-on? No, no, they can no longer keep silence, and I've announced that I intend to interpellate them this very day."

It was the announcement of Mege's interpellation, following the terrible article of the "Voix du Peuple," which thus set the lobbies in an uproar. And Pierre remained rather scared at this big political affair falling into the midst of his scheme to save a wretched pauper from hunger and death. Thus he listened without fully understanding the explanations which the Socialist deputy was passionately giving him, while all around them the uproar increased, and bursts of laughter rang out, testifying to the astonishment which the others felt at seeing Mege in conversation with a priest.

"How stupid they are!" said Mege disdainfully. "Do they think then that I eat a cassock for *dejeuner* every morning? But I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur Froment. Come, take a place on that seat and wait for Fonsegue."

Then he himself plunged into all the turmoil, and Pierre realised that his best course was to sit down and wait quietly. His surroundings began to influence and interest him, and he gradually forgot Laveuve for the passion of the Parliamentary crisis amidst which he found himself cast. The frightful Panama adventure was scarcely over; he had followed the progress of that tragedy with the anguish of a man who every night expects to hear the tocsin sound the last hour of olden, agonising society. And now a little Panama was beginning, a fresh cracking of the social edifice, an affair such as had been frequent in all parliaments in connection with big financial questions, but one which acquired mortal gravity from the circumstances in which it came to the front. That story of the African Railway Lines, that little patch of mud, stirred up and exhaling a perturbing odour, and suddenly fomenting all that emotion, fear, and anger in the Chamber, was after all but an opportunity for political strife, a field on which the voracious appetites of the various "groups" would take exercise and sharpen; and, at bottom, the sole question was that of overthrowing the ministry and replacing it by another. Only, behind all that lust of power, that continuous onslaught of ambition, what a distressful prey was stirring – the whole people with all its poverty and its sufferings!

Pierre noticed that Massot, "little Massot," as he was generally called, had just seated himself on the bench beside him. With his lively eye and ready ear listening to everything and noting it, gliding everywhere with his ferret-like air, Massot was not there in the capacity of a gallery man, but had simply scented a stormy debate, and come to see if he could not pick up material for some occasional "copy." And this priest lost in the midst of the throng doubtless interested him.

"Have a little patience, Monsieur l'Abbe," said he, with the amiable gaiety of a young gentleman who makes fun of everything. "The governor will certainly come, for he knows well enough that they are going to heat the oven here. You are not one of his constituents from La Correze, are you?"

"No, no! I belong to Paris; I've come on account of a poor fellow whom I wish to get admitted into the Asylum of the Invalids of Labour."

"Oh! all right. Well, I'm a child of Paris, too."

Then Massot laughed. And indeed he was a child of Paris, son of a chemist of the St. Denis district, and an ex-dunce of the Lycee Charlemagne, where he had not even finished his studies. He had failed entirely, and at eighteen years of age had found himself cast into journalism with barely sufficient knowledge of orthography for that calling. And for twelve years now, as he often said, he had been a rolling stone wandering through all spheres of society, confessing some and guessing at others. He had seen everything, and become disgusted with everything, no longer believing in the existence of great men, or of truth, but living peacefully enough on universal malice and folly. He naturally had no literary ambition, in fact he professed a deliberate contempt for literature. Withal, he was not a fool, but wrote in accordance with no matter what views in no matter what newspaper,

having neither conviction nor belief, but quietly claiming the right to say whatever he pleased to the public on condition that he either amused or impassioned it.

"And so," said he, "you know Mege, Monsieur l'Abbe? What a study in character, eh? A big child, a dreamer of dreams in the skin of a terrible sectarian! Oh! I have had a deal of intercourse with him, I know him thoroughly. You are no doubt aware that he lives on with the everlasting conviction that he will attain to power in six months' time, and that between evening and morning he will have established that famous Collectivist community which is to succeed capitalist society, just as day follows night. And, by the way, as regards his interpellation to-day, he is convinced that in overthrowing the Barroux ministry he'll be hastening his own turn. His system is to use up his adversaries. How many times haven't I heard him making his calculations: there's such a one to be used up, then such a one, and then such a one, so that he himself may at last reign. And it's always to come off in six months at the latest. The misfortune is, however, that others are always springing up, and so his turn never comes at all."

Little Massot openly made merry over it. Then, slightly lowering his voice, he asked: "And Sagnier, do you know him? No? Do you see that red-haired man with the bull's neck – the one who looks like a butcher? That one yonder who is talking in a little group of frayed frock-coats."

Pierre at last perceived the man in question. He had broad red ears, a hanging under-lip, a large nose, and big, projecting dull eyes.

"I know that one thoroughly, as well," continued Massot; "I was on the 'Voix du Peuple' under him before I went on the 'Globe.' The one thing that nobody is exactly aware of is whence Sagnier first came. He long dragged out his life in the lower depths of journalism, doing nothing at all brilliant, but wild with ambition and appetite. Perhaps you remember the first hubbub he made, that rather dirty affair of a new Louis XVII. which he tried to launch, and which made him the extraordinary Royalist that he still is. Then it occurred to him to espouse the cause of the masses, and he made a display of vengeful Catholic socialism, attacking the Republic and all the abominations of the times in the name of justice and morality, under the pretext of curing them. He began with a series of sketches of financiers, a mass of dirty, uncontrolled, unproved tittle-tattle, which ought to have led him to the dock, but which met, as you know, with such wonderful success when gathered together in a volume. And he goes on in the same style in the 'Voix du Peuple,' which he himself made a success at the time of the Panama affair by dint of denunciation and scandal, and which to-day is like a sewer-pipe pouring forth all the filth of the times. And whenever the stream slackens, why, he invents things just to satisfy his craving for that hubbub on which both his pride and his pocket subsist."

Little Massot spoke without bitterness; indeed, he had even begun to laugh again. Beneath his thoughtless ferocity he really felt some respect for Sagnier. "Oh! he's a bandit," he continued, "but a clever fellow all the same. You can't imagine how full of vanity he is. Lately it occurred to him to get himself acclaimed by the populace, for he pretends to be a kind of King of the Markets, you know. Perhaps he has ended by taking his fine judge-like airs in earnest, and really believes that he is saving the people and helping the cause of virtue. What astonishes me is his fertility in the arts of denunciation and scandalmongering. Never a morning comes but he discovers some fresh horror, and delivers fresh culprits over to the hatred of the masses. No! the stream of mud never ceases; there is an incessant, unexpected spurt of infamy, an increase of monstrous fancies each time that the disgusted public shows any sign of weariness. And, do you know, there's genius in that, Monsieur l'Abbe; for he is well aware that his circulation goes up as soon as he threatens to speak out and publish a list of traitors and bribe-takers. His sales are certain now for some days to come."

Listening to Massot's gay, bantering voice, Pierre began to understand certain things, the exact meaning of which had hitherto escaped him. He ended by questioning the young journalist, surprised as he was that so many deputies should be in the lobbies when the sitting was in progress. Oh! the sitting indeed. The gravest matters, some bill of national interest, might be under discussion, yet every member fled from it at the sudden threat of an interpellation which might overturn the ministry.

And the passion stirring there was the restrained anger, the growing anxiety of the present ministry's clients, who feared that they might have to give place to others; and it was also the sudden hope, the eager hunger of all who were waiting – the clients of the various possible ministries of the morrow.

Massot pointed to Barroux, the head of the Cabinet, who, though he was out of his element in the Department of Finances, had taken it simply because his generally recognised integrity was calculated to reassure public opinion after the Panama crisis. Barroux was chatting in a corner with the Minister of Public Instruction, Senator Taboureau, an old university man with a shrinking, mournful air, who was extremely honest, but totally ignorant of Paris, coming as he did from some far-away provincial faculty. Barroux for his part was of decorative aspect, tall, and with a handsome, clean-shaven face, which would have looked quite noble had not his nose been rather too small. Although he was sixty, he still had a profusion of curly snow-white hair completing the somewhat theatrical majesty of his appearance, which he was wont to turn to account when in the tribune. Coming of an old Parisian family, well-to-do, an advocate by profession, then a Republican journalist under the Empire, he had reached office with Gambetta, showing himself at once honest and romantic, loud of speech, and somewhat stupid, but at the same time very brave and very upright, and still clinging with ardent faith to the principles of the great Revolution. However, his Jacobinism was getting out of fashion, he was becoming an "ancestor," as it were, one of the last props of the middle-class Republic, and the new comers, the young politicians with long teeth, were beginning to smile at him. Moreover, beneath the ostentation of his demeanour, and the pomp of his eloquence, there was a man of hesitating, sentimental nature, a good fellow who shed tears when re-perusing the verses of Lamartine.

However, Monferrand, the minister for the Home Department, passed by and drew Barroux aside to whisper a few words in his ear. He, Monferrand, was fifty, short and fat, with a smiling, fatherly air; nevertheless a look of keen intelligence appeared at times on his round and somewhat common face fringed by a beard which was still dark. In him one divined a man of government, with hands which were fitted for difficult tasks, and which never released a prey. Formerly mayor of the town of Tulle, he came from La Correze, where he owned a large estate. He was certainly a force in motion, one whose constant rise was anxiously watched by keen observers. He spoke in a simple quiet way, but with extraordinary power of conviction. Having apparently no ambition, affecting indeed the greatest disinterestedness, he nevertheless harboured the most ferocious appetites. Sagnier had written that he was a thief and a murderer, having strangled two of his aunts in order to inherit their property. But even if he were a murderer, he was certainly not a vulgar one.

Then, too, came another personage of the drama which was about to be performed – deputy Vignon, whose arrival agitated the various groups. The two ministers looked at him, whilst he, at once surrounded by his friends, smiled at them from a distance. He was not yet thirty-six. Slim, and of average height, very fair, with a fine blond beard of which he took great care, a Parisian by birth, having rapidly made his way in the government service, at one time Prefect at Bordeaux, he now represented youth and the future in the Chamber. He had realised that new men were needed in the direction of affairs in order to accomplish the more urgent, indispensable reforms; and very ambitious and intelligent as he was, knowing many things, he already had a programme, the application of which he was quite capable of attempting, in part at any rate. However, he evinced no haste, but was full of prudence and shrewdness, convinced that his day would dawn, strong in the fact that he was as yet compromised in nothing, but had all space before him. At bottom he was merely a first-class administrator, clear and precise in speech, and his programme only differed from Barroux's by the rejuvenation of its formulas, although the advent of a Vignon ministry in place of a Barroux ministry appeared an event of importance. And it was of Vignon that Sagnier had written that he aimed at the Presidency of the Republic, even should he have to march through blood to reach the Elysee Palace.

"*Mon Dieu*!" Massot was explaining, "it's quite possible that Sagnier isn't lying this time, and that he has really found a list of names in some pocket-book of Hunter's that has fallen into his hands.

I myself have long known that Hunter was Duvillard's vote-recruiter in the affair of the African Railways. But to understand matters one must first realise what his mode of proceeding was, the skill and the kind of amiable delicacy which he showed, which were far from the brutal corruption and dirty trafficking that people imagine. One must be such a man as Sagnier to picture a parliament as an open market, where every conscience is for sale and is impudently knocked down to the highest bidder. Oh! things happened in a very different way indeed; and they are explainable, and at times even excusable. Thus the article is levelled in particular against Barroux and Monferrand, who are designated in the clearest possible manner although they are not named. You are no doubt aware that at the time of the vote Barroux was at the Home Department and Monferrand at that of Public Works, and so now they are accused of having betrayed their trusts, the blackest of all social crimes. I don't know into what political combinations Barroux may have entered, but I am ready to swear that he put nothing in his pocket, for he is the most honest of men. As for Monferrand, that's another matter; he's a man to carve himself his share, only I should be much surprised if he had put himself in a bad position. He's incapable of a blunder, particularly of a stupid blunder, like that of taking money and leaving a receipt for it lying about."

Massot paused, and with a jerk of his head called Pierre's attention to Duthil, who, feverish, but nevertheless smiling, stood in a group which had just collected around the two ministers. "There! do you see that young man yonder, that dark handsome fellow whose beard looks so triumphant?"

"I know him," said Pierre.

"Oh! you know Duthil. Well, he's one who most certainly took money. But he's a mere bird. He came to us from Angouleme to lead the pleasantest of lives here, and he has no more conscience, no more scruples, than the pretty finches of his native part, who are ever love-making. Ah! for Duthil, Hunter's money was like manna due to him, and he never even paused to think that he was dirtying his fingers. You may be quite sure he feels astonished that people should attach the slightest importance to the matter."

Then Massot designated another deputy in the same group, a man of fifty or thereabouts, of slovenly aspect and lachrymose mien, lanky, too, like a maypole, and somewhat bent by the weight of his head, which was long and suggestive of a horse's. His scanty, straight, yellowish hair, his drooping moustaches, in fact the whole of his distracted countenance, expressed everlasting distress.

"And Chaigneux, do you know him?" continued Massot, referring to the deputy in question. "No? Well, look at him and ask yourself if it isn't quite as natural that he, too, should have taken money. He came from Arras. He was a solicitor there. When his division elected him he let politics intoxicate him, and sold his practice to make his fortune in Paris, where he installed himself with his wife and his three daughters. And you can picture his bewilderment amidst those four women, terrible women ever busy with finery, receiving and paying visits, and running after marriageable men who flee away. It's ill-luck with a vengeance, the daily defeat of a poor devil of mediocre attainments, who imagined that his position as a deputy would facilitate money-making, and who is drowning himself in it all. And so how can Chaigneux have done otherwise than take money, he who is always hard up for a five-hundred-franc note! I admit that originally he wasn't a dishonest man. But he's become one, that's all."

Massot was now fairly launched, and went on with his portraits, the series which he had, at one moment, dreamt of writing under the title of "Deputies for Sale." There were the simpletons who fell into the furnace, the men whom ambition goaded to exasperation, the low minds that yielded to the temptation of an open drawer, the company-promoters who grew intoxicated and lost ground by dint of dealing with big figures. At the same time, however, Massot admitted that these men were relatively few in number, and that black sheep were to be found in every parliament of the world. Then Sagnier's name cropped up again, and Massot remarked that only Sagnier could regard the French Chambers as mere dens of thieves.

Pierre, meantime, felt most interested in the tempest which the threat of a ministerial crisis was stirring up before him. Not only the men like Duthil and Chaigneux, pale at feeling the ground tremble beneath them, and wondering whether they would not sleep at the Mazas prison that night, were gathered round Barroux and Monferrand; all the latters' clients were there, all who enjoyed influence or office through them, and who would collapse and disappear should they happen to fall. And it was something to see the anxious glances and the pale dread amidst all the whispered chatter, the bits of information and tittle-tattle which were carried hither and thither. Then, in a neighbouring group formed round Vignon, who looked very calm and smiled, were the other clients, those who awaited the moment to climb to the assault of power, in order that they, in their turn, might at last possess influence or office. Eyes glittered with covetousness, hopeful delight could be read in them, pleasant surprise at the sudden opportunity now offered. Vignon avoided replying to the over-direct questions of his friends, and simply announced that he did not intend to intervene. Evidently enough his plan was to let Mege interpellate and overthrow the ministry, for he did not fear him, and in his own estimation would afterwards simply have to stoop to pick up the fallen portfolios.

"Ah! Monferrand now," little Massot was saying, "there's a rascal who trims his sails! I knew him as an anti-clerical, a devourer of priests, Monsieur l'Abbe, if you will allow me so to express myself; however, I don't say this to be agreeable to you, but I think I may tell you for certain that he has become reconciled to religion. At least, I have been told that Monseigneur Martha, who is a great converter, now seldom leaves him. This is calculated to please one in these new times, when science has become bankrupt, and religion blooms afresh with delicious mysticism on all sides, whether in art, literature, or society itself."

Massot was jesting, according to his wont; but he spoke so amiably that the priest could not do otherwise than bow. However, a great stir had set in before them; it was announced that Mege was about to ascend the tribune, and thereupon all the deputies hastened into the assembly hall, leaving only the inquisitive visitors and a few journalists in the Salle des Pas Perdus.

"It's astonishing that Fonsegue hasn't yet arrived," resumed Massot; "he's interested in what's going on. However, he's so cunning, that when he doesn't behave as others do, one may be sure that he has his reasons for it. Do you know him?" And as Pierre gave a negative answer, Massot went on: "Oh! he's a man of brains and real power – I speak with all freedom, you know, for I don't possess the bump of veneration; and, as for my editors, well, they're the very puppets that I know the best and pick to pieces with the most enjoyment. Fonsegue, also, is clearly designated in Sagnier's article. Moreover, he's one of Duvillard's usual clients. There can be no doubt that he took money, for he takes money in everything. Only he always protects himself, and takes it for reasons which may be acknowledged – as payment or commission on account of advertising, and so forth. And if I left him just now, looking, as it seemed to me, rather disturbed, and if he delays his arrival here to establish, as it were, a moral alibi, the truth must be that he has committed the first imprudent action in his life."

Then Massot rattled on, telling all there was to tell about Fonsegue. He, too, came from the department of La Correze, and had quarrelled for life with Monferrand after some unknown underhand affairs. Formerly an advocate at Tulle, his ambition had been to conquer Paris; and he had really conquered it, thanks to his big morning newspaper, "Le Globe," of which he was both founder and director. He now resided in a luxurious mansion in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and no enterprise was launched but he carved himself a princely share in it. He had a genius for "business," and employed his newspaper as a weapon to enable him to reign over the market. But how very carefully he had behaved, what long and skilful patience he had shown, before attaining to the reputation of a really serious man, who guided authoritatively the most virtuous and respected of the organs of the press! Though in reality he believed neither in God nor in Devil, he had made this newspaper the supporter of order, property, and family ties; and though he had become a Conservative Republican, since it was to his interest to be such, he had remained outwardly religious, affecting

a Spiritualism which reassured the *bourgeoisie*. And amidst all his accepted power, to which others bowed, he nevertheless had one hand deep in every available money-bag.

"Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe," said Massot, "see to what journalism may lead a man. There you have Sagnier and Fonsegue: just compare them a bit. In reality they are birds of the same feather: each has a quill and uses it. But how different the systems and the results. Sagnier's print is really a sewer which rolls him along and carries him to the cesspool; while the other's paper is certainly an example of the best journalism one can have, most carefully written, with a real literary flavour, a treat for readers of delicate minds, and an honour to the man who directs it. But at the bottom, good heavens! in both cases the farce is precisely the same!"

Massot burst out laughing, well pleased with this final thrust. Then all at once: "Ah! here's Fonsegue at last!" said he.

Quite at his ease, and still laughing, he forthwith introduced the priest. "This is Monsieur l'Abbe Froment, my dear *patron*, who has been waiting more than twenty minutes for you – I'm just going to see what is happening inside. You know that Mege is interpellating the government."

The new comer started slightly: "An interpellation!" said he. "All right, all right, I'll go to it."

Pierre was looking at him. He was about fifty years of age, short of stature, thin and active, still looking young without a grey hair in his black beard. He had sparkling eyes, too, but his mouth, said to be a terrible one, was hidden by his moustaches. And withal he looked a pleasant companion, full of wit to the tip of his little pointed nose, the nose of a sporting dog that is ever scenting game. "What can I do for you, Monsieur l'Abbe?" he inquired.

Then Pierre briefly presented his request, recounting his visit to Laveuve that morning, giving every heart-rending particular, and asking for the poor wretch's immediate admittance to the Asylum.

"Laveuve!" said the other, "but hasn't his affair been examined? Why, Duthil drew up a report on it, and things appeared to us of such a nature that we could not vote for the man's admittance."

But the priest insisted: "I assure you, monsieur, that your heart would have burst with compassion had you been with me this morning. It is revolting that an old man should be left in such frightful abandonment even for another hour. He must sleep at the Asylum to-night."

Fonsegue began to protest. "To-night! But it's impossible, altogether impossible! There are all sorts of indispensable formalities to be observed. And besides I alone cannot take such responsibility. I haven't the power. I am only the manager; all that I do is to execute the orders of the committee of lady patronesses."

"But it was precisely Baroness Duvillard who sent me to you, monsieur, telling me that you alone had the necessary authority to grant immediate admittance in an exceptional case."

"Oh! it was the Baroness who sent you? Ah! that is just like her, incapable of coming to any decision herself, and far too desirous of her own quietude to accept any responsibility. Why is it that she wants me to have the worries? No, no, Monsieur l'Abbe, I certainly won't go against all our regulations; I won't give an order which would perhaps embroil me with all those ladies. You don't know them, but they become positively terrible directly they attend our meetings."

He was growing lively, defending himself with a jocular air, whilst in secret he was fully determined to do nothing. However, just then Duthil abruptly reappeared, darting along bareheaded, hastening from lobby to lobby to recruit absent members, particularly those who were interested in the grave debate at that moment beginning. "What, Fonsegue!" he cried, "are you still here? Go, go to your seat at once, it's serious!" And thereupon he disappeared.

His colleague evinced no haste, however. It was as if the suspicious affair which was impassioning the Chamber had no concern for him. And he still smiled, although a slight feverish quiver made him blink. "Excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbe," he said at last. "You see that my friends have need of me. I repeat to you that I can do absolutely nothing for your *protege*."

But Pierre would not accept this reply as a final one. "No, no, monsieur," he rejoined, "go to your affairs, I will wait for you here. Don't come to a decision without full reflection. You are wanted,

and I feel that your mind is not sufficiently at liberty for you to listen to me properly. By-and-by, when you come back and give me your full attention, I am sure that you will grant me what I ask."

And, although Fonsegue, as he went off, repeated that he could not alter his decision, the priest stubbornly resolved to make him do so, and sat down on the bench again, prepared, if needful, to stay there till the evening. The Salle des Pas Perdus was now almost quite empty, and looked yet more frigid and mournful with its Laocoon and its Minerva, its bare commonplace walls like those of a railway-station waiting-room, between which all the scramble of the century passed, though apparently without even warming the lofty ceiling. Never had paler and more callous light entered by the large glazed doors, behind which one espied the little slumberous garden with its meagre, wintry lawns. And not an echo of the tempest of the sitting near at hand reached the spot; from the whole heavy pile there fell but death-like silence, and a covert quiver of distress that had come from far away, perhaps from the entire country.

It was that which now haunted Pierre's reverie. The whole ancient, envenomed sore spread out before his mind's eye, with its poison and virulence. Parliamentary rottenness had slowly increased till it had begun to attack society itself. Above all the low intrigues and the rush of personal ambition there certainly remained the loftier struggle of the contending principles, with history on the march, clearing the past away and seeking to bring more truth, justice, and happiness in the future. But in practice, if one only considered the horrid daily cuisine of the sphere, what an unbridling of egotistical appetite one beheld, what an absorbing passion to strangle one's neighbour and triumph oneself alone! Among the various groups one found but an incessant battle for power and the satisfactions that it gives. "Left," "Right," "Catholics," "Republicans," "Socialists," the names given to the parties of twenty different shades, were simply labels classifying forms of the one burning thirst to rule and dominate. All questions could be reduced to a single one, that of knowing whether this man, that man, or that other man should hold France in his grasp, to enjoy it, and distribute its favours among his creatures. And the worst was that the outcome of the great parliamentary battles, the days and the weeks lost in setting this man in the place of that man, and that other man in the place of this man, was simply stagnation, for not one of the three men was better than his fellows, and there were but vague points of difference between them; in such wise that the new master bungled the very same work as the previous one had bungled, forgetful, perforce, of programmes and promises as soon as ever he began to reign.

However, Pierre's thoughts invincibly reverted to Laveuve, whom he had momentarily forgotten, but who now seized hold of him again with a quiver as of anger and death. Ah! what could it matter to that poor old wretch, dying of hunger on his bed of rags, whether Mege should overthrow Barroux's ministry, and whether a Vignon ministry should ascend to power or not! At that rate, a century, two centuries, would be needed before there would be bread in the garrets where groan the lamed sons of labour, the old, broken-down beasts of burden. And behind Laveuve there appeared the whole army of misery, the whole multitude of the disinherited and the poor, who agonised and asked for justice whilst the Chamber, sitting in all pomp, grew furiously impassioned over the question as to whom the nation should belong to, as to who should devour it. Mire was flowing on in a broad stream, the hideous, bleeding, devouring sore displayed itself in all impudence, like some cancer which preys upon an organ and spreads to the heart. And what disgust, what nausea must such a spectacle inspire; and what a longing for the vengeful knife that would bring health and joy!

Pierre could not have told for how long he had been plunged in this reverie, when uproar again filled the hall. People were coming back, gesticulating and gathering in groups. And suddenly he heard little Massot exclaim near him: "Well, if it isn't down it's not much better off. I wouldn't give four sous for its chance of surviving."

He referred to the ministry, and began to recount the sitting to a fellow journalist who had just arrived. Mege had spoken very eloquently, with extraordinary fury of indignation against the rotten *bourgeoisie*, which rotted everything it touched; but, as usual, he had gone much too far, alarming the

Chamber by his very violence. And so, when Barroux had ascended the tribune to ask for a month's adjournment of the interpellation, he had merely had occasion to wax indignant, in all sincerity be it said, full of lofty anger that such infamous campaigns should be carried on by a certain portion of the press. Were the shameful Panama scandals about to be renewed? Were the national representatives going to let themselves be intimidated by fresh threats of denunciation? It was the Republic itself which its adversaries were seeking to submerge beneath a flood of abominations. No, no, the hour had come for one to collect one's thoughts, and work in quietude without allowing those who hungered for scandal to disturb the public peace. And the Chamber, impressed by these words, fearing, too, lest the electorate should at last grow utterly weary of the continuous overflow of filth, had adjourned the interpellation to that day month. However, although Vignon had not personally intervened in the debate, the whole of his group had voted against the ministry, with the result that the latter had merely secured a majority of two votes – a mockery.

"But in that case they will resign," said somebody to Massot.

"Yes, so it's rumoured. But Barroux is very tenacious. At all events if they show any obstinacy they will be down before a week is over, particularly as Sagnier, who is quite furious, declares that he will publish the list of names to-morrow."

Just then, indeed, Barroux and Monferrand were seen to pass, hastening along with thoughtful, busy mien, and followed by their anxious clients. It was said that the whole Cabinet was about to assemble to consider the position and come to a decision. And then Vignon, in his turn, reappeared amidst a stream of friends. He, for his part, was radiant, with a joy which he sought to conceal, calming his friends in his desire not to cry victory too soon. However, the eyes of the band glittered, like those of a pack of hounds when the moment draws near for the offal of the quarry to be distributed. And even Mege also looked triumphant. He had all but overthrown the ministry. That made another one that was worn out, and by-and-by he would wear out Vignon's, and at last govern in his turn.

"The devil!" muttered little Massot, "Chaigneux and Duthil look like whipped dogs. And see, there's nobody who is worth the governor. Just look at him, how superb he is, that Fonsegue! But good-by, I must now be off!"

Then he shook hands with his brother journalist unwilling as he was to remain any longer, although the sitting still continued, some bill of public importance again being debated before the rows of empty seats.

Chaigneux, with his desolate mien, had gone to lean against the pedestal of the high figure of Minerva; and never before had he been more bowed down by his needy distress, the everlasting anguish of his ill-luck. On the other hand, Duthil, in spite of everything, was perorating in the centre of a group with an affectation of scoffing unconcern; nevertheless nervous twitches made his nose pucker and distorted his mouth, while the whole of his handsome face was becoming moist with fear. And even as Massot had said, there really was only Fonsegue who showed composure and bravery, ever the same with his restless little figure, and his eyes beaming with wit, though at times they were just faintly clouded by a shadow of uneasiness.

Pierre had risen to renew his request; but Fonsegue forestalled him, vivaciously exclaiming: "No, no, Monsieur l'Abbe, I repeat that I cannot take on myself such an infraction of our rules. There was an inquiry, and a decision was arrived at. How would you have me over-rule it?"

"Monsieur," said the priest, in a tone of deep grief, "it is a question of an old man who is hungry and cold, and in danger of death if he be not succoured."

With a despairing gesture, the director of "Le Globe" seemed to take the very walls as witnesses of his powerlessness. No doubt he feared some nasty affair for his newspaper, in which he had abused the Invalids of Labour enterprise as an electoral weapon. Perhaps, too, the secret terror into which the sitting of the Chamber had just thrown him was hardening his heart. "I can do nothing," he repeated. "But naturally I don't ask better than to have my hands forced by the ladies of the Committee. You already have the support of the Baroness Duvillard, secure that of some others."

Pierre, who was determined to fight on to the very end, saw in this suggestion a supreme chance. “I know the Countess de Quinsac,” he said, “I can go to see her at once.”

“Quite so! an excellent idea, the Countess de Quinsac! Take a cab and go to see the Princess de Harn as well. She bestirs herself a great deal, and is becoming very influential. Secure the approval of these ladies, go back to the Baroness’s at seven, get a letter from her to cover me, and then call on me at the office of my paper. That done, your man shall sleep at the Asylum at nine o’clock!”

He evinced in speaking a kind of joyous good nature, as though he no longer doubted of success now that he ran no risk of compromising himself. And great hope again came back to the priest: “Ah! thank you, monsieur,” he said; “it is a work of salvation that you will accomplish.”

“But you surely know that I ask nothing better. Ah! if we could only cure misery, prevent hunger and thirst by a mere word. However, make haste, you have not a minute to lose.”

They shook hands, and Pierre at once tried to get out of the throng. This, however, was no easy task, for the various groups had grown larger as all the anger and anguish, roused by the recent debate, ebbed back there amid a confused tumult. It was as when a stone, cast into a pool, stirs the ooze below, and causes hidden, rotting things to rise once more to the surface. And Pierre had to bring his elbows into play and force a passage athwart the throng, betwixt the shivering cowardice of some, the insolent audacity of others, and the smirchings which sullied the greater number, given the contagion which inevitably prevailed. However, he carried away a fresh hope, and it seemed to him that if he should save a life, make but one man happy that day, it would be like a first instalment of redemption, a sign that a little forgiveness would be extended to the many follies and errors of that egotistical and all-devouring political world.

On reaching the vestibule a final incident detained him for a moment longer. Some commotion prevailed there following upon a quarrel between a man and an usher, the latter of whom had prevented the former from entering on finding that the admission ticket which he tendered was an old one, with its original date scratched out. The man, very rough at the outset, had then refrained from insisting, as if indeed sudden timidity had come upon him. And in this ill-dressed fellow Pierre was astonished to recognise Salvat, the journeyman engineer, whom he had seen going off in search of work that same morning. This time it was certainly he, tall, thin and ravaged, with dreamy yet flaming eyes, which set his pale starveling’s face aglow. He no longer carried his tool-bag; his ragged jacket was buttoned up and distended on the left side by something that he carried in a pocket, doubtless some hunk of bread. And on being repulsed by the ushers, he walked away, taking the Concorde bridge, slowly, as if chancewise, like a man who knows not whither he is going.

IV. SOCIAL SIDELIGHTS

IN her old faded drawing-room – a Louis Seize *salon* with grey woodwork – the Countess de Quinsac sat near the chimney-piece in her accustomed place. She was singularly like her son, with a long and noble face, her chin somewhat stern, but her eyes still beautiful beneath her fine snowy hair, which was arranged in the antiquated style of her youth. And whatever her haughty coldness, she knew how to be amiable, with perfect, kindly graciousness.

Slightly waving her hand after a long silence, she resumed, addressing herself to the Marquis de Morigny, who sat on the other side of the chimney, where for long years he had always taken the same armchair. “Ah! you are right, my friend, Providence has left us here forgotten, in a most abominable epoch.”

“Yes, we passed by the side of happiness and missed it,” the Marquis slowly replied, “and it was your fault, and doubtless mine as well.”

Smiling sadly, she stopped him with another wave of her hand. And the silence fell once more; not a sound from the streets reached that gloomy ground floor at the rear of the courtyard of an old mansion in the Rue St. Dominique, almost at the corner of the Rue de Bourgogne.

The Marquis was an old man of seventy-five, nine years older than the Countess. Short and thin though he was, he none the less had a distinguished air, with his clean-shaven face, furrowed by deep, aristocratic wrinkles. He belonged to one of the most ancient families of France, and remained one of the last hopeless Legitimists, of very pure and lofty views, zealously keeping his faith to the dead monarchy amidst the downfall of everything. His fortune, still estimated at several millions of francs, remained, as it were, in a state of stagnation, through his refusal to invest it in any of the enterprises of the century. It was known that in all discretion he had loved the Countess, even when M. de Quinsac was alive, and had, moreover, offered marriage after the latter’s death, at the time when the widow had sought a refuge on that damp ground floor with merely an income of some 15,000 francs, saved with great difficulty from the wreck of the family fortune. But she, who adored her son Gerard, then in his tenth year, and of delicate health, had sacrificed everything to the boy from a kind of maternal chasteness and a superstitious fear that she might lose him should she set another affection and another duty in her life. And the Marquis, while bowing to her decision, had continued to worship her with his whole soul, ever paying his court as on the first evening when he had seen her, still gallant and faithful after a quarter of a century had passed. There had never been anything between them, not even the exchange of a kiss.

Seeing how sad she looked, he feared that he might have displeased her, and so he asked: “I should have liked to render you happy, but I didn’t know how, and the fault can certainly only rest with me. Is Gerard giving you any cause for anxiety?”

She shook her head, and then replied: “As long as things remain as they are we cannot complain of them, my friend, since we accepted them.”

She referred to her son’s culpable connection with Baroness Duvillard. She had ever shown much weakness with regard to that son whom she had had so much trouble to rear, for she alone knew what exhaustion, what racial collapse was hidden behind his proud bearing. She tolerated his idleness, the apathetic disgust which, man of pleasure that he was, had turned him from the profession of diplomacy as from that of arms. How many times had she not repaired his acts of folly and paid his petty debts, keeping silent concerning them, and refusing all pecuniary help from the Marquis, who no longer dared offer his millions, so stubbornly intent she was on living upon the remnants of her own fortune. And thus she had ended by closing her eyes to her son’s scandalous love intrigue, divining in some measure how things had happened, through self-abandonment and lack of conscience – the man weak, unable to resume possession of himself, and the woman holding and retaining him. The

Marquis, however, strangely enough, had only forgiven the intrigue on the day when Eve had allowed herself to be converted.

"You know, my friend, how good-natured Gerard is," the Countess resumed. "In that lie both his strength and weakness. How would you have me scold him when he weeps over it all with me? He will tire of that woman."

M. de Morigny wagged his head. "She is still very beautiful," said he. "And then there's the daughter. It would be graver still if he were to marry her – "

"But the daughter's infirm?"

"Yes, and you know what would be said: A Quinsac marrying a monster for the sake of her millions."

This was their mutual terror. They knew everything that went on at the Duvillards, the affectionate friendship of the uncomely Camille and the handsome Gerard, the seeming idyll beneath which lurked the most awful of dramas. And they protested with all their indignation. "Oh! that, no, no, never!" the Countess declared. "My son in that family, no, I will never consent to it."

Just at that moment General de Bozonnet entered. He was much attached to his sister and came to keep her company on the days when she received, for the old circle had gradually dwindled down till now only a few faithful ones ventured into that grey gloomy *salon*, where one might have fancied oneself at thousands of leagues from present-day Paris. And forthwith, in order to enliven the room, he related that he had been to *dejeuner* at the Duvillards, and named the guests, Gerard among them. He knew that he pleased his sister by going to the banker's house whence he brought her news, a house, too, which he cleansed in some degree by conferring on it the great honour of his presence. And he himself in no wise felt bored there, for he had long been gained over to the century and showed himself of a very accommodating disposition in everything that did not pertain to military art.

"That poor little Camille worships Gerard," said he; "she was devouring him with her eyes at table."

But M. de Morigny gravely intervened: "There lies the danger, a marriage would be absolutely monstrous from every point of view."

The General seemed astonished: "Why, pray? She isn't beautiful, but it's not only the beauties who marry! And there are her millions. However, our dear child would only have to put them to a good use. True, there is also the mother; but, *mon Dieu*! such things are so common nowadays in Paris society."

This revolted the Marquis, who made a gesture of utter disgust. What was the use of discussion when all collapsed? How could one answer a Bozonnet, the last surviving representative of such an illustrious family, when he reached such a point as to excuse the infamous morals that prevailed under the Republic; after denying his king, too, and serving the Empire, faithfully and passionately attaching himself to the fortunes and memory of Caesar? However, the Countess also became indignant: "Oh! what are you saying, brother? I will never authorize such a scandal, I swore so only just now."

"Don't swear, sister," exclaimed the General; "for my part I should like to see our Gerard happy. That's all. And one must admit that he's not good for much. I can understand that he didn't go into the Army, for that profession is done for. But I do not so well understand why he did not enter the diplomatic profession, or accept some other occupation. It is very fine, no doubt, to run down the present times and declare that a man of our sphere cannot possibly do any clean work in them. But, as a matter of fact, it is only idle fellows who still say that. And Gerard has but one excuse, his lack of aptitude, will and strength."

Tears had risen to the mother's eyes. She even trembled, well knowing how deceitful were appearances: a mere chill might carry her son off, however tall and strong he might look. And was he not indeed a symbol of that old-time aristocracy, still so lofty and proud in appearance, though at bottom it is but dust?

"Well," continued the General, "he's thirty-six now; he's constantly hanging on your hands, and he must make an end of it all."

However, the Countess silenced him and turned to the Marquis: "Let us put our confidence in God, my friend," said she. "He cannot but come to my help, for I have never willingly offended Him."

"Never!" replied the Marquis, who in that one word set an expression of all his grief, all his affection and worship for that woman whom he had adored for so many years.

But another faithful friend came in and the conversation changed. M. de Larombiere, Vice-President of the Appeal Court, was an old man of seventy-five, thin, bald and clean shaven but for a pair of little white whiskers. And his grey eyes, compressed mouth and square and obstinate chin lent an expression of great austerity to his long face. The grief of his life was that, being afflicted with a somewhat childish lisp, he had never been able to make his full merits known when a public prosecutor, for he esteemed himself to be a great orator. And this secret worry rendered him morose. In him appeared an incarnation of that old royalist France which sulked and only served the Republic against its heart, that old stern magistracy which closed itself to all evolution, to all new views of things and beings. Of petty "gown" nobility, originally a Legitimist but now supporting Orleanism, he believed himself to be the one man of wisdom and logic in that *salon*, where he was very proud to meet the Marquis.

They talked of the last events; but with them political conversation was soon exhausted, amounting as it did to a mere bitter condemnation of men and occurrences, for all three were of one mind as to the abominations of the Republican *regime*. They themselves, however, were only ruins, the remnants of the old parties now all but utterly powerless. The Marquis for his part soared on high, yielding in nothing, ever faithful to the dead past; he was one of the last representatives of that lofty obstinate *noblesse* which dies when it finds itself without an effort to escape its fate. The judge, who at least had a pretender living, relied on a miracle, and demonstrated the necessity for one if France were not to sink into the depths of misfortune and completely disappear. And as for the General, all that he regretted of the two Empires was their great wars; he left the faint hope of a Bonapartist restoration on one side to declare that by not contenting itself with the Imperial military system, and by substituting thereto obligatory service, the nation in arms, the Republic had killed both warfare and the country.

When the Countess's one man-servant came to ask her if she would consent to receive Abbe Froment she seemed somewhat surprised. "What can he want of me? Show him in," she said.

She was very pious, and having met Pierre in connection with various charitable enterprises, she had been touched by his zeal as well as by the saintly reputation which he owed to his Neuilly parishioners.

He, absorbed by his fever, felt intimidated directly he crossed the threshold. He could at first distinguish nothing, but fancied he was entering some place of mourning, a shadowy spot where human forms seemed to melt away, and voices were never raised above a whisper. Then, on perceiving the persons present, he felt yet more out of his element, for they seemed so sad, so far removed from the world whence he had just come, and whither he was about to return. And when the Countess had made him sit down beside her in front of the chimney-piece, it was in a low voice that he told her the lamentable story of Laveuve, and asked her support to secure the man's admittance to the Asylum for the Invalids of Labour.

"Ah! yes," said she, "that enterprise which my son wished me to belong to. But, Monsieur l'Abbe, I have never once attended the Committee meetings. So how could I intervene, having assuredly no influence whatever?"

Again had the figures of Eve and Gerard arisen before her, for it was at this asylum that the pair had first met. And influenced by her sorrowful maternal love she was already weakening, although it was regretfully that she had lent her name to one of those noisy charitable enterprises, which people abused to further their selfish interests in a manner she condemned.

"But, madame," Pierre insisted, "it is a question of a poor starving old man. I implore you to be compassionate."

Although the priest had spoken in a low voice the General drew near. "It's for your old revolutionary that you are running about, is it not," said he. "Didn't you succeed with the manager, then? The fact is that it's difficult to feel any pity for fellows who, if they were the masters, would, as they themselves say, sweep us all away."

M. de Larombiere jerked his chin approvingly. For some time past he had been haunted by the Anarchist peril. But Pierre, distressed and quivering, again began to plead his cause. He spoke of all the frightful misery, the homes where there was no food, the women and children shivering with cold, and the fathers scouring muddy, wintry Paris in search of a bit of bread. All that he asked for was a line on a visiting card, a kindly word from the Countess, which he would at once carry to Baroness Duvillard to prevail on her to set the regulations aside. And his words fell one by one, tremulous with stifled tears, in that mournful *salon*, like sounds from afar, dying away in a dead world where there was no echo left.

Madame de Quinsac turned towards M. de Morigny, but he seemed to take no interest in it all. He was gazing fixedly at the fire, with the haughty air of a stranger who was indifferent to the things and beings in whose midst an error of time compelled him to live. But feeling that the glance of the woman he worshipped was fixed upon him he raised his head; and then their eyes met for a moment with an expression of infinite gentleness, the mournful gentleness of their heroic love.

"*Mon Dieu*!" said she, "I know your merits, Monsieur l'Abbe, and I won't refuse my help to one of your good works."

Then she went off for a moment, and returned with a card on which she had written that she supported with all her heart Monsieur l'Abbe Froment in the steps he was taking. And he thanked her and went off delighted, as if he carried yet a fresh hope of salvation from that drawing-room where, as he retired, gloom and silence once more seemed to fall on that old lady and her last faithful friends gathered around the fire, last relics of a world that was soon to disappear.

Once outside, Pierre joyfully climbed into his cab again, after giving the Princess de Harn's address in the Avenue Kleber. If he could also obtain her approval he would no longer doubt of success. However, there was such a crush on the Concorde bridge, that the driver had to walk his horse. And, on the foot-pavement, Pierre again saw Duthil, who, with a cigar between his lips, was smiling at the crowd, with his amiable bird-like heedlessness, happy as he felt at finding the pavement dry and the sky blue on leaving that worrying sitting of the Chamber. Seeing how gay and triumphant he looked, a sudden inspiration came to the priest, who said to himself that he ought to win over this young man, whose report had had such a disastrous effect. As it happened, the cab having been compelled to stop altogether, the deputy had just recognized him and was smiling at him.

"Where are you going, Monsieur Duthil?" Pierre asked.

"Close by, in the Champs Elysees."

"I'm going that way, and, as I should much like to speak to you for a moment, it would be very kind of you to take a seat beside me. I will set you down wherever you like."

"Willingly, Monsieur l'Abbe. It won't inconvenience you if I finish my cigar?"

"Oh! not at all."

The cab found its way out of the crush, crossed the Place de la Concorde and began to ascend the Champs Elysees. And Pierre, reflecting that he had very few minutes before him, at once attacked Duthil, quite ready for any effort to convince him. He remembered what a sortie the young deputy had made against Laveuve at the Baron's; and thus he was astonished to hear him interrupt and say quite pleasantly, enlivened as he seemed by the bright sun which was again beginning to shine: "Ah, yes! your old drunkard! So you didn't settle his business with Fonsegue? And what is it you want? To have him admitted to-day? Well, you know I don't oppose it?"

"But there's your report."

"My report, oh, my report! But questions change according to the way one looks at them. And if you are so anxious about your Laveuve I won't refuse to help you."

Pierre looked at him in astonishment, at bottom extremely well pleased. And there was no further necessity even for him to speak.

"You didn't take the matter in hand properly," continued Duthil, leaning forward with a confidential air. "It's the Baron who's the master at home, for reasons which you may divine, which you may very likely know. The Baroness does all that he asks without even discussing the point; and this morning, – instead of starting on a lot of useless visits, you only had to gain his support, particularly as he seemed to be very well disposed. And she would then have given way immediately." Duthil began to laugh. "And so," he continued, "do you know what I'll do? Well, I'll gain the Baron over to your cause. Yes, I am this moment going to a house where he is, where one is certain to find him every day at this time." Then he laughed more loudly. "And perhaps you are not ignorant of it, Monsieur l'Abbe. When he is there you may be certain he never gives a refusal. I promise you I'll make him swear that he will compel his wife to grant your man admission this very evening. Only it will, perhaps, be rather late."

Then all at once, as if struck by a fresh idea, Duthil went on: "But why shouldn't you come with me? You secure a line from the Baron, and thereupon, without losing a minute, you go in search of the Baroness. Ah! yes, the house embarrasses you a little, I understand it. Would you like to see only the Baron there? You can wait for him in a little *salon* downstairs; I will bring him to you."

This proposal made Duthil altogether merry, but Pierre, quite scared, hesitated at the idea of thus going to Silviane d'Aulnay's. It was hardly a place for him. However, to achieve his purpose, he would have descended into the very dwelling of the fiend, and had already done so sometimes with Abbe Rose, when there was hope of assuaging wretchedness. So he turned to Duthil and consented to accompany him.

Silviane d'Aulnay's little mansion, a very luxurious one, displaying, too, so to say, the luxury of a temple, refined but suggestive of gallantry, stood in the Avenue d'Antin, near the Champs Elysees. The inmate of this sanctuary, where the orfrays of old dalmaticas glittered in the mauve reflections from the windows of stained-glass, had just completed her twenty-fifth year. Short and slim she was, of an adorable, dark beauty, and all Paris was acquainted with her delicious, virginal countenance of a gentle oval, her delicate nose, her little mouth, her candid cheeks and artless chin, above all which she wore her black hair in thick, heavy bands, which hid her low brow. Her notoriety was due precisely to her pretty air of astonishment, the infinite purity of her blue eyes, the whole expression of chaste innocence which she assumed when it so pleased her, an expression which contrasted powerfully with her true nature, shameless creature that she really was, of the most monstrous, confessed, and openly-displayed perversity; such as, in fact, often spring up from the rotting soil of great cities. Extraordinary things were related about Silviane's tastes and fancies. Some said that she was a door-keeper's, others a doctor's, daughter. In any case she had managed to acquire instruction and manners, for when occasion required she lacked neither wit, nor style, nor deportment. She had been rolling through the theatres for ten years or so, applauded for her beauty's sake, and she had even ended by obtaining some pretty little successes in such parts as those of very pure young girls or loving and persecuted young women. Since there had been a question, though, of her entering the Comedie Francaise to play the *role* of Pauline in "Polyeucte," some people had waxed indignant and others had roared with laughter, so ridiculous did the idea appear, so outrageous for the majesty of classic tragedy. She, however, quiet and stubborn, wished this thing to be, was resolved that it should be, certain as she was that she would secure it, insolent like a creature to whom men had never yet been able to refuse anything.

That day, at three o'clock, Gerard de Quinsac, not knowing how to kill the time pending the appointment he had given Eve in the Rue Matignon, had thought of calling at Silviane's, which was in the neighbourhood. She was an old caprice of his, and even nowadays he would sometimes linger

at the little mansion if its pretty mistress felt bored. But he had this time found her in a fury; and, reclining in one of the deep armchairs of the *salon* where "old gold" formed the predominant colour, he was listening to her complaints. She, standing in a white gown, white indeed from head to foot like Eve herself at the *dejeuner*, was speaking passionately, and fast convincing the young man, who, won over by so much youth and beauty, unconsciously compared her to his other flame, weary already of his coming assignation, and so mastered by supineness, both moral and physical, that he would have preferred to remain all day in the depths of that armchair.

"You hear me, Gerard!" she at last exclaimed, "I'll have nothing whatever to do with him, unless he brings me my nomination."

Just then Baron Duvillard came in, and forthwith she changed to ice and received him like some sorely offended young queen who awaits an explanation; whilst he, who foresaw the storm and brought moreover disastrous tidings, forced a smile, though very ill at ease. She was the stain, the blemish attaching to that man who was yet so sturdy and so powerful amidst the general decline of his race. And she was also the beginning of justice and punishment, taking all his piled-up gold from him by the handful, and by her cruelty avenging those who shivered and who starved. And it was pitiful to see that feared and flattered man, beneath whom states and governments trembled, here turn pale with anxiety, bend low in all humility, and relapse into the senile, lisping infancy of acute passion.

"Ah! my dear friend," said he, "if you only knew how I have been rushing about. I had a lot of worrying business, some contractors to see, a big advertisement affair to settle, and I feared that I should never be able to come and kiss your hand."

He kissed it, but she let her arm fall, coldly, indifferently, contenting herself with looking at him, waiting for what he might have to say to her, and embarrassing him to such a point that he began to perspire and stammer, unable to express himself. "Of course," he began, "I also thought of you, and went to the Fine Arts Office, where I had received a positive promise. Oh! they are still very much in your favour at the Fine Arts Office! Only, just fancy, it's that idiot of a minister, that Taboureau,[3] an old professor from the provinces who knows nothing about our Paris, that has expressly opposed your nomination, saying that as long as he is in office you shall not appear at the Comedie."

Erect and rigid, she spoke but two words: "And then?"

"And then – well, my dear, what would you have me do? One can't after all overthrow a ministry to enable you to play the part of Pauline."

"Why not?"

He pretended to laugh, but his blood rushed to his face, and the whole of his sturdy figure quivered with anguish. "Come, my little Silviane," said he, "don't be obstinate. You can be so nice when you choose. Give up the idea of that *debut*. You, yourself, would risk a great deal in it, for what would be your worries if you were to fail? You would weep all the tears in your body. And besides, you can ask me for so many other things which I should be so happy to give you. Come now, at once, make a wish and I will gratify it immediately."

In a frolicsome way he sought to take her hand again. But she drew back with an air of much dignity. "No, you hear me, my dear fellow, I will have nothing whatever to do with you – nothing, so long as I don't play Pauline."

He understood her fully, and he knew her well enough to realise how rigorously she would treat him. Only a kind of grunt came from his contracted throat, though he still tried to treat the matter in a jesting way. "Isn't she bad-tempered to-day!" he resumed at last, turning towards Gerard. "What have you done to her that I find her in such a state?"

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[3] Taboureau is previously described as Minister of Public Instruction. It should be pointed out, however, that although under the present Republic the Ministries of Public Instruction and Fine Arts have occasionally been distinct departments, at other times they have been united, one minister, as in Taboureau's case, having charge of both. – Trans.

But the young man, who kept very quiet for fear lest he himself might be bespattered in the course of the dispute, continued to stretch himself out in a languid way and gave no answer.

But Silviane's anger burst forth. "What has he done to me? He has pitied me for being at the mercy of such a man as you – so egotistical, so insensible to the insults heaped upon me. Ought you not to be the first to bound with indignation? Ought you not to have exacted my admittance to the Comedie as a reparation for the insult? For, after all, it is a defeat for you; if I'm considered unworthy, you are struck at the same time as I am. And so I'm a drab, eh? Say at once that I'm a creature to be driven away from all respectable houses."

She went on in this style, coming at last to vile words, the abominable words which, in moments of anger, always ended by returning to her innocent-looking lips. The Baron, who well knew that a syllable from him would only increase the foulness of the overflow, vainly turned an imploring glance on the Count to solicit his intervention. Gerard, with his keen desire for peace and quietness, often brought about a reconciliation, but this time he did not stir, feeling too lazy and sleepy to interfere. And Silviane all at once came to a finish, repeating her trenchant, severing words: "Well, manage as you can, secure my *debut*, or I'll have nothing more to do with you, nothing!"

"All right! all right!" Duvillard at last murmured, sneering, but in despair, "we'll arrange it all."

However, at that moment a servant came in to say that M. Duthil was downstairs and wished to speak to the Baron in the smoking-room. Duvillard was astonished at this, for Duthil usually came up as though the house were his own. Then he reflected that the deputy had doubtless brought him some serious news from the Chamber which he wished to impart to him confidentially at once. So he followed the servant, leaving Gerard and Silviane together.

In the smoking-room, an apartment communicating with the hall by a wide bay, the curtain of which was drawn up, Pierre stood with his companion, waiting and glancing curiously around him. What particularly struck him was the almost religious solemnness of the entrance, the heavy hangings, the mystic gleams of the stained-glass, the old furniture steeped in chapel-like gloom amidst scattered perfumes of myrrh and incense. Duthil, who was still very gay, tapped a low divan with his cane and said: "She has a nicely-furnished house, eh? Oh! she knows how to look after her interests."

Then the Baron came in, still quite upset and anxious. And without even perceiving the priest, desirous as he was of tidings, he began: "Well, what did they do? Is there some very bad news, then?"

"Mege interpellated and applied for a declaration of urgency so as to overthrow Barroux. You can imagine what his speech was."

"Yes, yes, against the *bourgeois*, against me, against you. It's always the same thing – And then?"

"Then – well, urgency wasn't voted, but, in spite of a very fine defence, Barroux only secured a majority of two votes."

"Two votes, the devil! Then he's down, and we shall have a Vignon ministry next week."

"That's what everybody said in the lobbies."

The Baron frowned, as if he were estimating what good or evil might result to the world from such a change. Then, with a gesture of displeasure, he said: "A Vignon ministry! The devil! that would hardly be any better. Those young democrats pretend to be virtuous, and a Vignon ministry wouldn't admit Silviane to the Comedie."

This, at first, was his only thought in presence of the crisis which made the political world tremble. And so the deputy could not refrain from referring to his own anxiety. "Well, and we others, what is our position in it all?"

This brought Duvillard back to the situation. With a fresh gesture, this time a superbly proud one, he expressed his full and impudent confidence. "We others, why we remain as we are; we've never been in peril, I imagine. Oh! I am quite at ease. Sagnier can publish his famous list if it amuses him to do so. If we haven't long since bought Sagnier and his list, it's because Barroux is a thoroughly honest man, and for my part I don't care to throw money out of the window – I repeat to you that we fear nothing."

Then, as he at last recognised Abbe Froment, who had remained in the shade, Duthil explained what service the priest desired of him. And Duvillard, in his state of emotion, his heart still rent by Silviane's sternness, must have felt a covert hope that a good action might bring him luck; so he at once consented to intervene in favour of Laveuve's admission. Taking a card and a pencil from his pocket-book he drew near to the window. "Oh! whatever you desire, Monsieur l'Abbe," he said, "I shall be very happy to participate in this good work. Here, this is what I have written: 'My dear, please do what M. l'Abbe Froment solicits in favour of this unfortunate man, since our friend Fonsegue only awaits a word from you to take proper steps.'"

At this moment through the open bay Pierre caught sight of Gerard, whom Silviane, calm once more, and inquisitive no doubt to know why Duthil had called, was escorting into the hall. And the sight of the young woman filled him with astonishment, so simple and gentle did she seem to him, full of the immaculate candour of a virgin. Never had he dreamt of a lily of more unobtrusive yet delicious bloom in the whole garden of innocence.

"Now," continued Duvillard, "if you wish to hand this card to my wife at once, you must go to the Princess de Harn's, where there is a *matinee*– "

"I was going there, Monsieur le Baron."

"Very good. You will certainly find my wife there; she is to take the children there." Then he paused, for he too had just seen Gerard; and he called him: "I say, Gerard, my wife said that she was going to that *matinee*, didn't she? You feel sure – don't you? – that Monsieur l'Abbe will find her there?"

Although the young man was then going to the Rue Matignon, there to wait for Eve, it was in the most natural manner possible that he replied: "If Monsieur l'Abbe makes haste, I think he will find her there, for she was certainly going there before trying on a corsage at Salmon's."

Then he kissed Silviane's hand, and went off with the air of a handsome, indolent man, who knows no malice, and is even weary of pleasure.

Pierre, feeling rather embarrassed, was obliged to let Duvillard introduce him to the mistress of the house. He bowed in silence, whilst she, likewise silent, returned his bow with modest reserve, the tact appropriate to the occasion, such as no *ingenue*, even at the Comedie, was then capable of. And while the Baron accompanied the priest to the door, she returned to the *salon* with Duthil, who was scarcely screened by the door-curtain before he passed his arm round her waist.

When Pierre, who at last felt confident of success, found himself, still in his cab, in front of the Princess de Harn's mansion in the Avenue Kleber, he suddenly relapsed into great embarrassment. The avenue was crowded with carriages brought thither by the musical *matinee*, and such a throng of arriving guests pressed round the entrance, decorated with a kind of tent with scallopings of red velvet, that he deemed the house unapproachable. How could he manage to get in? And how in his cassock could he reach the Princess, and ask for a minute's conversation with Baroness Duvillard? Amidst all his feverishness he had not thought of these difficulties. However, he was approaching the door on foot, asking himself how he might glide unperceived through the throng, when the sound of a merry voice made him turn: "What, Monsieur l'Abbe! Is it possible! So now I find you here!"

It was little Massot who spoke. He went everywhere, witnessed ten sights a day, – a parliamentary sitting, a funeral, a wedding, any festive or mourning scene, – when he wanted a good subject for an article. "What! Monsieur l'Abbe," he resumed, "and so you have come to our amiable Princess's to see the Mauritanians dance!"

He was jesting, for the so-called Mauritanians were simply six Spanish dancing-girls, who by the sensuality of their performance were then making all Paris rush to the Folies-Bergere. For drawing-room entertainments these girls reserved yet more indecorous dances – dances of such a character indeed that they would certainly not have been allowed in a theatre. And the *beau monde* rushed to see them at the houses of the bolder lady-entertainers, the eccentric and foreign ones like the Princess, who in order to draw society recoiled from no "attraction."

But when Pierre had explained to little Massot that he was still running about on the same business, the journalist obligingly offered to pilot him. He knew the house, obtained admittance by a back door, and brought Pierre along a passage into a corner of the hall, near the very entrance of the grand drawing-room. Lofty green plants decorated this hall, and in the spot selected Pierre was virtually hidden. "Don't stir, my dear Abbe," said Massot, "I will try to ferret out the Princess for you. And you shall know if Baroness Duvillard has already arrived."

What surprised Pierre was that every window-shutter of the mansion was closed, every chink stopped up so that daylight might not enter, and that every room flared with electric lamps, an illumination of supernatural intensity. The heat was already very great, the atmosphere heavy with a violent perfume of flowers and *odore di femina*. And to Pierre, who felt both blinded and stifled, it seemed as if he were entering one of those luxurious, unearthly Dens of the Flesh such as the pleasure-world of Paris conjures from dreamland. By rising on tiptoes, as the drawing-room entrance was wide open, he could distinguish the backs of the women who were already seated, rows of necks crowned with fair or dark hair. The Mauritanians were doubtless executing their first dance. He did not see them, but he could divine the lascivious passion of the dance from the quiver of all those women's necks, which swayed as beneath a great gust of wind. Then laughter arose and a tempest of bravos, quite a tumult of enjoyment.

"I can't put my hand on the Princess; you must wait a little," Massot returned to say. "I met Janzen and he promised to bring her to me. Don't you know Janzen?"

Then, in part because his profession willed it, and in part for pleasure's sake, he began to gossip. The Princess was a good friend of his. He had described her first *soiree* during the previous year, when she had made her *debut* at that mansion on her arrival in Paris. He knew the real truth about her so far as it could be known. Rich? yes, perhaps she was, for she spent enormous sums. Married she must have been, and to a real prince, too; no doubt she was still married to him, in spite of her story of widowhood. Indeed, it seemed certain that her husband, who was as handsome as an archangel, was travelling about with a vocalist. As for having a bee in her bonnet that was beyond discussion, as clear as noonday. Whilst showing much intelligence, she constantly and suddenly shifted. Incapable of any prolonged effort, she went from one thing that had awakened her curiosity to another, never attaching herself anywhere. After ardently busying herself with painting, she had lately become impassioned for chemistry, and was now letting poetry master her.

"And so you don't know Janzen," continued Massot. "It was he who threw her into chemistry, into the study of explosives especially, for, as you may imagine, the only interest in chemistry for her is its connection with Anarchism. She, I think, is really an Austrian, though one must always doubt anything she herself says. As for Janzen, he calls himself a Russian, but he's probably German. Oh! he's the most unobtrusive, enigmatical man in the world, without a home, perhaps without a name – a terrible fellow with an unknown past. I myself hold proofs which make me think that he took part in that frightful crime at Barcelona. At all events, for nearly a year now I've been meeting him in Paris, where the police no doubt are watching him. And nothing can rid me of the idea that he merely consented to become our lunatic Princess's lover in order to throw the detectives off the scent. He affects to live in the midst of *fetes*, and he has introduced to the house some extraordinary people, Anarchists of all nationalities and all colours – for instance, one Raphanel, that fat, jovial little man yonder, a Frenchman he is, and his companions would do well to mistrust him. Then there's a Bergaz, a Spaniard, I think, an obscure jobber at the Bourse, whose sensual, blobber-lipped mouth is so disquieting. And there are others and others, adventurers and bandits from the four corners of the earth!.. Ah! the foreign colonies of our Parisian pleasure-world! There are a few spotless fine names, a few real great fortunes among them, but as for the rest, ah! what a herd!"

Rosemonde's own drawing-room was summed up in those words: resounding titles, real millionaires, then, down below, the most extravagant medley of international imposture and turpitude. And Pierre thought of that internationalism, that cosmopolitanism, that flight of foreigners which,

ever denser and denser, swooped down upon Paris. Most certainly it came thither to enjoy it, as to a city of adventure and delight, and it helped to rot it a little more. Was it then a necessary thing, that decomposition of the great cities which have governed the world, that affluxion of every passion, every desire, every gratification, that accumulation of reeking soil from all parts of the world, there where, in beauty and intelligence, blooms the flower of civilisation?

However, Janzen appeared, a tall, thin fellow of about thirty, very fair with grey, pale, harsh eyes, and a pointed beard and flowing curly hair which elongated his livid, cloudy face. He spoke indifferent French in a low voice and without a gesture. And he declared that the Princess could not be found; he had looked for her everywhere. Possibly, if somebody had displeased her, she had shut herself up in her room and gone to bed, leaving her guests to amuse themselves in all freedom in whatever way they might choose.

"Why, but here she is!" suddenly said Massot.

Rosemonde was indeed there, in the vestibule, watching the door as if she expected somebody. Short, slight, and strange rather than pretty, with her delicate face, her sea-green eyes, her small quivering nose, her rather large and over-ruddy mouth, which was parted so that one could see her superb teeth, she that day wore a sky-blue gown spangled with silver; and she had silver bracelets on her arms and a silver circlet in her pale brown hair, which rained down in curls and frizzy, straggling locks as though waving in a perpetual breeze.

"Oh! whatever you desire, Monsieur l'Abbe," she said to Pierre as soon as she knew his business. "If they don't take your old man in at our asylum, send him to me, I'll take him, I will; I will sleep him somewhere here."

Still, she remained disturbed, and continually glanced towards the door. And on the priest asking if Baroness Duvillard had yet arrived, "Why no!" she cried, "and I am much surprised at it. She is to bring her son and daughter. Yesterday, Hyacinthe positively promised me that he would come."

There lay her new caprice. If her passion for chemistry was giving way to a budding taste for decadent, symbolical verse, it was because one evening, whilst discussing Occultism with Hyacinthe, she had discovered an extraordinary beauty in him: the astral beauty of Nero's wandering soul! At least, said she, the signs of it were certain.

And all at once she quitted Pierre: "Ah, at last!" she cried, feeling relieved and happy. Then she darted forward: Hyacinthe was coming in with his sister Camille.

On the very threshold, however, he had just met the friend on whose account he was there, young Lord George Eldrett, a pale and languid stripling with the hair of a girl; and he scarcely condescended to notice the tender greeting of Rosemonde, for he professed to regard woman as an impure and degrading creature. Distressed by such coldness, she followed the two young men, returning in their rear into the reeking, blinding furnace of the drawing-room.

Massot, however, had been obliging enough to stop Camille and bring her to Pierre, who at the first words they exchanged relapsed into despair. "What, mademoiselle, has not madame your mother accompanied you here?"

The girl, clad according to her wont in a dark gown, this time of peacock-blue, was nervous, with wicked eyes and sibilant voice. And as she ragefully drew up her little figure, her deformity, her left shoulder higher than the right one, became more apparent than ever. "No," she rejoined, "she was unable. She had something to try on at her dressmaker's. We stopped too long at the Exposition du Lis, and she requested us to set her down at Salmon's door on our way here."

It was Camille herself who had skilfully prolonged the visit to the art show, still hoping to prevent her mother from meeting Gerard. And her rage arose from the ease with which her mother had got rid of her, thanks to that falsehood of having something to try on.

"But," ingenuously said Pierre, "if I went at once to this person Salmon, I might perhaps be able to send up my card."

Camille gave a shrill laugh, so funny did the idea appear to her. Then she retorted: “Oh! who knows if you would still find her there? She had another pressing appointment, and is no doubt already keeping it!”

“Well, then, I will wait for her here. She will surely come to fetch you, will she not?”

“Fetch us? Oh no! since I tell you that she has other important affairs to attend to. The carriage will take us home alone, my brother and I.”

Increasing bitterness was infecting the girl’s pain-fraught irony. Did he not understand her then, that priest who asked such naive questions which were like dagger-thrusts in her heart? Yet he must know, since everybody knew the truth.

“Ah! how worried I am,” Pierre resumed, so grieved indeed that tears almost came to his eyes. “It’s still on account of that poor man about whom I have been busying myself since this morning. I have a line from your father, and Monsieur Gerard told me – ” But at this point he paused in confusion, and amidst all his thoughtlessness of the world, absorbed as he was in the one passion of charity, he suddenly divined the truth. “Yes,” he added mechanically, “I just now saw your father again with Monsieur de Quinsac.”

“I know, I know,” replied Camille, with the suffering yet scoffing air of a girl who is ignorant of nothing. “Well, Monsieur l’Abbe, if you have a line from papa for mamma, you must wait till mamma has finished her business. You might come to the house about six o’clock, but I doubt if you’ll find her there, as she may well be detained.”

While Camille thus spoke, her murderous eyes glistened, and each word she uttered, simple as it seemed, became instinct with ferocity, as if it were a knife, which she would have liked to plunge into her mother’s breast. In all certainty she had never before hated her mother to such a point as this in her envy of her beauty and her happiness in being loved. And the irony which poured from the girl’s virgin lips, before that simple priest, was like a flood of mire with which she sought to submerge her rival.

Just then, however, Rosemonde came back again, feverish and flurried as usual. And she led Camille away: “Ah, my dear, make haste. They are extraordinary, delightful, intoxicating!”

Janzen and little Massot also followed the Princess. All the men hastened from the adjoining rooms, scrambled and plunged into the *salon* at the news that the Mauritanians had again begun to dance. That time it must have been the frantic, lascivious gallop that Paris whispered about, for Pierre saw the rows of necks and heads, now fair, now dark, wave and quiver as beneath a violent wind. With every window-shutter closed, the conflagration of the electric lamps turned the place into a perfect brazier, reeking with human effluvia. And there came a spell of rapture, fresh laughter and bravos, all the delight of an overflowing orgy.

When Pierre again found himself on the footwalk, he remained for a moment bewildered, blinking, astonished to be in broad daylight once more. Half-past four would soon strike, but he had nearly two hours to wait before calling at the house in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy. What should he do? He paid his driver; preferring to descend the Champs Elysees on foot, since he had some time to lose. A walk, moreover, might calm the fever which was burning his hands, in the passion of charity which ever since the morning had been mastering him more and more, in proportion as he encountered fresh and fresh obstacles. He now had but one pressing desire, to complete his good work, since success henceforth seemed certain. And he tried to restrain his steps and walk leisurely down the magnificent avenue, which had now been dried by the bright sun, and was enlivened by a concourse of people, while overhead the sky was again blue, lightly blue, as in springtime.

Nearly two hours to lose while, yonder, the wretched Laveuve lay with life ebbing from him on his bed of rags, in his icy den. Sudden feelings of revolt, of well-nigh irresistible impatience ascended from Pierre’s heart, making him quiver with desire to run off and at once find Baroness Duvillard so as to obtain from her the all-saving order. He felt sure that she was somewhere near, in one of those quiet neighbouring streets, and great was his perturbation, his grief-fraught anger at having to wait

in this wise to save a human life until she should have attended to those affairs of hers, of which her daughter spoke with such murderous glances! He seemed to hear a formidable cracking, the family life of the *bourgeoisie* was collapsing: the father was at a hussy's house, the mother with a lover, the son and daughter knew everything; the former gliding to idiotic perversity, the latter enraged and dreaming of stealing her mother's lover to make a husband of him. And meantime the splendid equipages descended the triumphal avenue, and the crowd with its luxury flowed along the sidewalks, one and all joyous and superb, seemingly with no idea that somewhere at the far end there was a gaping abyss wherein everyone of them would fall and be annihilated!

When Pierre got as far as the Summer Circus he was much surprised at again seeing Salvat, the journeyman engineer, on one of the avenue seats. He must have sunk down there, overcome by weariness and hunger, after many a vain search. However, his jacket was still distended by something he carried in or under it, some bit of bread, no doubt, which he meant to take home with him. And leaning back, with his arms hanging listlessly, he was watching with dreamy eyes the play of some very little children, who, with the help of their wooden spades, were laboriously raising mounds of sand, and then destroying them by dint of kicks. As he looked at them his red eyelids moistened, and a very gentle smile appeared on his poor discoloured lips. This time Pierre, penetrated by disquietude, wished to approach and question him. But Salvat distrustfully rose and went off towards the Circus, where a concert was drawing to a close; and he prowled around the entrance of that festive edifice in which two thousand happy people were heaped up together listening to music.

V. FROM RELIGION TO ANARCHY

AS Pierre was reaching the Place de la Concorde he suddenly remembered the appointment which Abbe Rose had given him for five o'clock at the Madeleine, and which he was forgetting in the feverishness born of his repeated steps to save Laveuve. And at thought of it he hastened on, well pleased at having this appointment to occupy and keep him patient.

When he entered the church he was surprised to find it so dark. There were only a few candles burning, huge shadows were flooding the nave, and amidst the semi-obscurity a very loud, clear voice spoke on with a ceaseless streaming of words. All that one could at first distinguish of the numerous congregation was a pale, vague mass of heads, motionless with extreme attention. In the pulpit stood Monseigneur Martha, finishing his third address on the New Spirit. The two former ones had re-echoed far and wide, and so what is called "all Paris" was there – women of society, politicians, and writers, who were captivated by the speaker's artistic oratory, his warm, skilful language, and his broad, easy gestures, worthy of a great actor.

Pierre did not wish to disturb the solemn attention, the quivering silence above which the prelate's voice alone rang out. Accordingly he resolved to wait before seeking Abbe Rose, and remained standing near a pillar. A parting gleam of daylight fell obliquely on Monseigneur Martha, who looked tall and sturdy in his white surplice, and scarcely showed a grey hair, although he was more than fifty. He had handsome features: black, keen eyes, a commanding nose, a mouth and chin of the greatest firmness of contour. What more particularly struck one, however, what gained the heart of every listener, was the expression of extreme amiability and anxious sympathy which ever softened the imperious haughtiness of the prelate's face.

Pierre had formerly known him as Cure, or parish priest, of Ste. Clotilde. He was doubtless of Italian origin, but he had been born in Paris, and had quitted the seminary of St. Sulpice with the best possible record. Very intelligent and very ambitious, he had evinced an activity which even made his superiors anxious. Then, on being appointed Bishop of Persepolis, he had disappeared, gone to Rome, where he had spent five years engaged in work of which very little was known. However, since his return he had been astonishing Paris by his brilliant propaganda, busying himself with the most varied affairs, and becoming much appreciated and very powerful at the archiepiscopal residence. He devoted himself in particular, and with wonderful results, to the task of increasing the subscriptions for the completion of the basilica of the Sacred Heart. He recoiled from nothing, neither from journeys, nor lectures, nor collections, nor applications to Government, nor even endeavours among Israelites and Freemasons. And at last, again enlarging his sphere of action, he had undertaken to reconcile Science with Catholicism, and to bring all Christian France to the Republic, on all sides expounding the policy of Pope Leo XIII., in order that the Church might finally triumph.

However, in spite of the advances of this influential and amiable man, Pierre scarcely liked him. He only felt grateful to him for one thing, the appointment of good Abbe Rose as curate at St. Pierre de Montmartre, which appointment he had secured for him no doubt in order to prevent such a scandal as the punishment of an old priest for showing himself too charitable. On thus finding and hearing the prelate speak in that renowned pulpit of the Madeleine, still and ever pursuing his work of conquest, Pierre remembered how he had seen him at the Duvillards' during the previous spring, when, with his usual *maestria*, he had achieved his greatest triumph – the conversion of Eve to Catholicism. That church, too, had witnessed her baptism, a wonderfully pompous ceremony, a perfect gala offered to the public which figures in all the great events of Parisian life. Gerard had knelt down, moved to tears, whilst the Baron triumphed like a good-natured husband who was happy to find religion establishing perfect harmony in his household. It was related among the spectators that Eve's family, and particularly old Justus Steinberger, her father, was not in reality much displeased by the affair. The old man sneeringly remarked, indeed, that he knew his daughter well enough to

wish her to belong to his worst enemy. In the banking business there is a class of security which one is pleased to see discounted by one's rivals. With the stubborn hope of triumph peculiar to his race, Justus, consoling himself for the failure of his first scheme, doubtless considered that Eve would prove a powerful dissolving agent in the Christian family which she had entered, and thus help to make all wealth and power fall into the hands of the Jews.

However, Pierre's vision faded. Monseigneur Martha's voice was rising with increase of volume, celebrating, amidst the quivering of the congregation, the benefits that would accrue from the New Spirit, which was at last about to pacify France and restore her to her due rank and power. Were there not certain signs of this resurrection on every hand? The New Spirit was the revival of the Ideal, the protest of the soul against degrading materialism, the triumph of spirituality over filthy literature; and it was also Science accepted, but set in its proper place, reconciled with Faith, since it no longer pretended to encroach on the latter's sacred domain; and it was further the Democracy welcomed in fatherly fashion, the Republic legitimated, recognised in her turn as Eldest Daughter of the Church. A breath of poetry passed by. The Church opened her heart to all her children, there would henceforth be but concord and delight if the masses, obedient to the New Spirit, would give themselves to the Master of love as they had given themselves to their kings, recognising that the Divinity was the one unique power, absolute sovereign of both body and soul.

Pierre was now listening attentively, wondering where it was that he had previously heard almost identical words. And suddenly he remembered; and could fancy that he was again at Rome, listening to the last words of Monsignor Nani, the Assessor of the Holy Office. Here, again, he found the dream of a democratic Pope, ceasing to support the compromised monarchies, and seeking to subdue the masses. Since Caesar was down, or nearly so, might not the Pope realise the ancient ambition of his forerunners and become both emperor and pontiff, the sovereign, universal divinity on earth? This, too, was the dream in which Pierre himself, with apostolic naivete, had indulged when writing his book, "New Rome": a dream from which the sight of the real Rome had so roughly roused him. At bottom it was merely a policy of hypocritical falsehood, the priestly policy which relies on time, and is ever tenacious, carrying on the work of conquest with extraordinary suppleness, resolved to profit by everything. And what an evolution it was, the Church of Rome making advances to Science, to the Democracy, to the Republican *regimes*, convinced that it would be able to devour them if only it were allowed the time! Ah! yes, the New Spirit was simply the Old Spirit of Domination, incessantly reviving and hungering to conquer and possess the world.

Pierre thought that he recognised among the congregation certain deputies whom he had seen at the Chamber. Wasn't that tall gentleman with the fair beard, who listened so devoutly, one of Monferrand's creatures? It was said that Monferrand, once a devourer of priests, was now smilingly coquetting with the clergy. Quite an underhand evolution was beginning in the sacristies, orders from Rome flitted hither and thither; it was a question of accepting the new form of government, and absorbing it by dint of invasion. France was still the Eldest Daughter of the Church, the only great nation which had sufficient health and strength to place the Pope in possession of his temporal power once more. So France must be won; it was well worth one's while to espouse her, even if she were Republican. In the eager struggle of ambition the bishop made use of the minister, who thought it to his interest to lean upon the bishop. But which of the two would end by devouring the other? And to what a *role* had religion sunk: an electoral weapon, an element in a parliamentary majority, a decisive, secret reason for obtaining or retaining a ministerial portfolio! Of divine charity, the basis of religion, there was no thought, and Pierre's heart filled with bitterness as he remembered the recent death of Cardinal Bergerot, the last of the great saints and pure minds of the French episcopacy, among which there now seemed to be merely a set of intriguers and fools.

However, the address was drawing to a close. In a glowing peroration, which evoked the basilica of the Sacred Heart dominating Paris with the saving symbol of the Cross from the sacred Mount of

the Martyrs,[4] Monseigneur Martha showed that great city of Paris Christian once more and master of the world, thanks to the moral omnipotence conferred upon it by the divine breath of the New Spirit. Unable to applaud, the congregation gave utterance to a murmur of approving rapture, delighted as it was with this miraculous finish which reassured both pocket and conscience. Then Monseigneur Martha quitted the pulpit with a noble step, whilst a loud noise of chairs broke upon the dark peacefulness of the church, where the few lighted candles glittered like the first stars in the evening sky. A long stream of men, vague, whispering shadows, glided away. The women alone remained, praying on their knees.

Pierre, still in the same spot, was rising on tip-toes, looking for Abbe Rose, when a hand touched him. It was that of the old priest, who had seen him from a distance. “I was yonder near the pulpit,” said he, “and I saw you plainly, my dear child. Only I preferred to wait so as to disturb nobody. What a beautiful address dear Monseigneur delivered!”

He seemed, indeed, much moved. But there was deep sadness about his kindly mouth and clear childlike eyes, whose smile as a rule illumined his good, round white face. “I was afraid you might go off without seeing me,” he resumed, “for I have something to tell you. You know that poor old man to whom I sent you this morning and in whom I asked you to interest yourself? Well, on getting home I found a lady there, who sometimes brings me a little money for my poor. Then I thought to myself that the three francs I gave you were really too small a sum, and as the thought worried me like a kind of remorse, I couldn’t resist the impulse, but went this afternoon to the Rue des Saules myself.”

He lowered his voice from a feeling of respect, in order not to disturb the deep, sepulchral silence of the church. Covert shame, moreover, impeded his utterance, shame at having again relapsed into the sin of blind, imprudent charity, as his superiors reproachfully said. And, quivering, he concluded in a very low voice indeed: “And so, my child, picture my grief. I had five francs more to give the poor old man, and I found him dead.”

Pierre suddenly shuddered. But he was unwilling to understand: “What, dead!” he cried. “That old man dead! Laveuve dead?”

“Yes, I found him dead – ah! amidst what frightful wretchedness, like an old animal that has laid itself down for the finish on a heap of rags in the depths of a hole. No neighbours had assisted him in his last moments; he had simply turned himself towards the wall. And ah! how bare and cold and deserted it was! And what a pang for a poor creature to go off like that without a word, a caress. Ah! my heart bounded within me and it is still bleeding!”

Pierre in his utter amazement at first made but a gesture of revolt against imbecile social cruelty. Had the bread left near the unfortunate wretch, and devoured too eagerly, perhaps, after long days of abstinence, been the cause of his death? Or was not this rather the fatal *denouement* of an ended life, worn away by labour and privation? However, what did the cause signify? Death had come and delivered the poor man. “It isn’t he that I pity,” Pierre muttered at last; “it is we – we who witness all that, we who are guilty of these abominations.”

But good Abbe Rose was already becoming resigned, and would only think of forgiveness and hope. “No, no, my child, rebellion is evil. If we are all guilty we can only implore Providence to forget our faults. I had given you an appointment here hoping for good news; and it’s I who come to tell you of that frightful thing. Let us be penitent and pray.”

Then he knelt upon the flagstones near the pillar, in the rear of the praying women, who looked black and vague in the gloom. And he inclined his white head, and for a long time remained in a posture of humility.

But Pierre was unable to pray, so powerfully did revolt stir him. He did not even bend his knees, but remained erect and quivering. His heart seemed to have been crushed; not a tear came to his ardent eyes. So Laveuve had died yonder, stretched on his litter of rags, his hands clenched in

[4] Montmartre.

his obstinate desire to cling to his life of torture, whilst he, Pierre, again glowing with the flame of charity, consumed by apostolic zeal, was scouring Paris to find him for the evening a clean bed on which he might be saved. Ah! the atrocious irony of it all! He must have been at the Duvillards' in the warm *salon*, all blue and silver, whilst the old man was expiring; and it was for a wretched corpse that he had then hastened to the Chamber of Deputies, to the Countess de Quinsac's, to that creature Silviane's, and to that creature Rosemonde's. And it was for that corpse, freed from life, escaped from misery as from prison, that he had worried people, broken in upon their egotism, disturbed the peace of some, threatened the pleasures of others! What was the use of hastening from the parliamentary den to the cold *salon* where the dust of the past was congealing; of going from the sphere of middle-class debauchery to that of cosmopolitan extravagance, since one always arrived too late, and saved people when they were already dead? How ridiculous to have allowed himself to be fired once more by that blaze of charity, that final conflagration, only the ashes of which he now felt within him? This time he thought he was dead himself; he was naught but an empty sepulchre.

And all the frightful void and chaos which he had felt that morning at the basilica of the Sacred Heart after his mass became yet deeper, henceforth unfathomable. If charity were illusory and useless the Gospel crumbled, the end of the Book was nigh. After centuries of stubborn efforts, Redemption through Christianity failed, and another means of salvation was needed by the world in presence of the exasperated thirst for justice which came from the duped and wretched nations. They would have no more of that deceptive paradise, the promise of which had so long served to prop up social iniquity; they demanded that the question of happiness should be decided upon this earth. But how? By means of what new religion, what combination between the sentiment of the Divine and the necessity for honouring life in its sovereignty and its fruitfulness? Therein lay the grievous, torturing problem, into the midst of which Pierre was sinking; he, a priest, severed by vows of chastity and superstition from the rest of mankind.

He had ceased to believe in the efficacy of alms; it was not sufficient that one should be charitable, henceforth one must be just. Given justice, indeed, horrid misery would disappear, and no such thing as charity would be needed. Most certainly there was no lack of compassionate hearts in that grievous city of Paris; charitable foundations sprouted forth there like green leaves at the first warmth of springtide. There were some for every age, every peril, every misfortune. Through the concern shown for mothers, children were succoured even before they were born; then came the infant and orphan asylums lavishly provided for all sorts of classes; and, afterwards, man was followed through his life, help was tendered on all sides, particularly as he grew old, by a multiplicity of asylums, almshouses, and refuges. And there were all the hands stretched out to the forsaken ones, the disinherited ones, even the criminals, all sorts of associations to protect the weak, societies for the prevention of crime, homes that offered hospitality to those who repented. Whether as regards the propagation of good deeds, the support of the young, the saving of life, the bestowal of pecuniary help, or the promotion of guilds, pages and pages would have been needed merely to particularise the extraordinary vegetation of charity that sprouted between the paving-stones of Paris with so fine a vigour, in which goodness of soul was mingled with social vanity. Still that could not matter, since charity redeemed and purified all. But how terrible the proposition that this charity was a useless mockery! What! after so many centuries of Christian charity not a sore had healed. Misery had only grown and spread, irritated even to rage. Incessantly aggravated, the evil was reaching the point when it would be impossible to tolerate it for another day, since social injustice was neither arrested nor even diminished thereby. And besides, if only one single old man died of cold and hunger, did not the social edifice, raised on the theory of charity, collapse? But one victim, and society was condemned, thought Pierre.

He now felt such bitterness of heart that he could remain no longer in that church where the shadows ever slowly fell, blurring the sanctuaries and the large pale images of Christ nailed upon the Cross. All was about to sink into darkness, and he could hear nothing beyond an expiring murmur

of prayers, a plaint from the women who were praying on their knees, in the depths of the shrouding gloom.

At the same time he hardly liked to go off without saying a word to Abbe Rose, who in his entreaties born of simple faith left the happiness and peace of mankind to the good pleasure of the Invisible. However, fearing that he might disturb him, Pierre was making up his mind to retire, when the old priest of his own accord raised his head. “Ah, my child,” said he, “how difficult it is to be good in a reasonable manner. Monseigneur Martha has scolded me again, and but for the forgiveness of God I should fear for my salvation.”

For a moment Pierre paused under the porticus of the Madeleine, on the summit of the great flight of steps which, rising above the railings, dominates the Place. Before him was the Rue Royale dipping down to the expanse of the Place de la Concorde, where rose the obelisk and the pair of plashing fountains. And, farther yet, the paling colonnade of the Chamber of Deputies bounded the horizon. It was a vista of sovereign grandeur under that pale sky over which twilight was slowly stealing, and which seemed to broaden the thoroughfares, throw back the edifices, and lend them the quivering, soaring aspect of the palaces of dreamland. No other capital in the world could boast a scene of such aerial pomp, such grandiose magnificence, at that hour of vagueness, when falling night imparts to cities a dreamy semblance, the infinite of human immensity.

Motionless and hesitating in presence of the opening expanse, Pierre distressfully pondered as to whither he should go now that all which he had so passionately sought to achieve since the morning had suddenly crumbled away. Was he still bound for the Duvillard mansion in the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy? He no longer knew. Then the exasperating remembrance, with its cruel irony, returned to him. Since Laveuve was dead, of what use was it for him to kill time and perambulate the pavements pending the arrival of six o’clock? The idea that he had a home, and that the most simple course would be to return to it, did not even occur to him. He felt as if there were something of importance left for him to do, though he could not possibly tell what it might be. It seemed to him to be everywhere and yet very far away, to be so vague and so difficult of accomplishment that he would certainly never be in time or have sufficient power to do it. However, with heavy feet and tumultuous brain he descended the steps and, yielding to some obstinate impulse, began to walk through the flower-market, a late winter market where the first azaleas were opening with a little shiver. Some women were purchasing Nice roses and violets; and Pierre looked at them as if he were interested in all that soft, delicate, perfumed luxury. But suddenly he felt a horror of it and went off, starting along the Boulevards.

He walked straight before him without knowing why or whither. The falling darkness surprised him as if it were an unexpected phenomenon. Raising his eyes to the sky he felt astonished at seeing its azure gently pale between the slender black streaks of the chimney funnels. And the huge golden letters by which names or trades were advertised on every balcony also seemed to him singular in the last gleams of the daylight. Never before had he paid attention to the motley tints seen on the house-fronts, the painted mirrors, the blinds, the coats of arms, the posters of violent hues, the magnificent shops, like drawing-rooms and boudoirs open to the full light. And then, both in the roadway and along the foot-pavements, between the blue, red or yellow columns and kiosks, what mighty traffic there was, what an extraordinary crowd! The vehicles rolled along in a thundering stream: on all sides billows of cabs were parted by the ponderous tacking of huge omnibuses, which suggested lofty, bright-hued battle-ships. And on either hand, and farther and farther, and even among the wheels, the flood of passengers rushed on incessantly, with the conquering haste of ants in a state of revolution. Whence came all those people, and whither were all those vehicles going? How stupefying and torturing it all was.

Pierre was still walking straight ahead, mechanically, carried on by his gloomy reverie. Night was coming, the first gas-burners were being lighted; it was the dusk of Paris, the hour when real darkness has not yet come, when the electric lights flame in the dying day. Lamps shone forth on all sides, the shop-fronts were being illumined. Soon, moreover, right along the Boulevards the vehicles

would carry their vivid starry lights, like a milky way on the march betwixt the foot-pavements all glowing with lanterns and cordons and girandoles, a dazzling profusion of radiance akin to sunlight. And the shouts of the drivers and the jostling of the foot passengers re-echoed the parting haste of the Paris which is all business or passion, which is absorbed in the merciless struggle for love and for money. The hard day was over, and now the Paris of Pleasure was lighting up for its night of *fete*. The cafes, the wine shops, the restaurants, flared and displayed their bright metal bars, and their little white tables behind their clear and lofty windows, whilst near their doors, by way of temptation, were oysters and choice fruits. And the Paris which was thus awaking with the first flashes of the gas was already full of the gaiety of enjoyment, already yielding to an unbridled appetite for whatsoever may be purchased.

However, Pierre had a narrow escape from being knocked down. A flock of newspaper hawkers came out of a side street, and darted through the crowd shouting the titles of the evening journals. A fresh edition of the "Voix du Peuple" gave rise, in particular, to a deafening clamour, which rose above all the rumbling of wheels. At regular intervals hoarse voices raised and repeated the cry: "Ask for the 'Voix du Peuple' – the new scandal of the African Railway Lines, the repulse of the ministry, the thirty-two bribe-takers of the Chamber and the Senate!" And these announcements, set in huge type, could be read on the copies of the paper, which the hawkers flourished like banners. Accustomed as it was to such filth, saturated with infamy, the crowd continued on its way without paying much attention. Still a few men paused and bought the paper, while painted women, who had come down to the Boulevards in search of a dinner, trailed their skirts and waited for some chance lover, glancing interrogatively at the outside customers of the cafes. And meantime the dishonouring shout of the newspaper hawkers, that cry in which there was both smirch and buffet, seemed like the last knell of the day, ringing the nation's funeral at the outset of the night of pleasure which was beginning.

Then Pierre once more remembered his morning and that frightful house in the Rue des Saules, where so much want and suffering were heaped up. He again saw the yard filthy like a quagmire, the evil-smelling staircases, the sordid, bare, icy rooms, the families fighting for messes which even stray dogs would not have eaten; the mothers, with exhausted breasts, carrying screaming children to and fro; the old men who fell in corners like brute beasts, and died of hunger amidst filth. And then came his other hours with the magnificence or the quietude or the gaiety of the *salons* through which he had passed, the whole insolent display of financial Paris, and political Paris, and society Paris. And at last he came to the dusk, and to that Paris-Sodom and Paris-Gomorrah before him, which was lighting itself up for the night, for the abominations of that accomplice night which, like fine dust, was little by little submerging the expanse of roofs. And the hateful monstrosity of it all howled aloud under the pale sky where the first pure, twinkling stars were gleaming.

A great shudder came upon Pierre as he thought of all that mass of iniquity and suffering, of all that went on below amid want and crime, and all that went on above amid wealth and vice. The *bourgeoisie*, wielding power, would relinquish naught of the sovereignty which it had conquered, wholly stolen, while the people, the eternal dupe, silent so long, clenched its fists and growled, claiming its legitimate share. And it was that frightful injustice which filled the growing gloom with anger. From what dark-breasted cloud would the thunderbolt fall? For years he had been waiting for that thunderbolt which low rumbles announced on all points of the horizon. And if he had written a book full of candour and hope, if he had gone in all innocence to Rome, it was to avert that thunderbolt and its frightful consequences. But all hope of the kind was dead within him; he felt that the thunderbolt was inevitable, that nothing henceforth could stay the catastrophe. And never before had he felt it to be so near, amidst the happy impudence of some, and the exasperated distress of others. And it was gathering, and it would surely fall over that Paris, all lust and bravado, which, when evening came, thus stirred up its furnace.

Tired out and distracted, Pierre raised his eyes as he reached the Place de l'Opera. Where was he then? The heart of the great city seemed to beat on this spot, in that vast expanse where

met so many thoroughfares, as if from every point the blood of distant districts flowed thither along triumphal avenues. Right away to the horizon stretched the great gaps of the Avenue de l'Opera, the Rue du Quatre-Septembre, and the Rue de la Paix, still showing clearly in a final glimpse of daylight, but already starred with swarming sparks. The torrent of the Boulevard traffic poured across the Place, where clashed, too, all that from the neighbouring streets, with a constant turning and eddying which made the spot the most dangerous of whirlpools. In vain did the police seek to impose some little prudence, the stream of pedestrians still overflowed, wheels became entangled and horses reared amidst all the uproar of the human tide, which was as loud, as incessant, as the tempest voice of an ocean. Then there was the detached mass of the opera-house, slowly steeped in gloom, and rising huge and mysterious like a symbol, its lyre-bearing figure of Apollo, right aloft, showing a last reflection of daylight amidst the livid sky. And all the windows of the house-fronts began to shine, gaiety sprang from those thousands of lamps which coruscated one by one, a universal longing for ease and free gratification of each desire spread with the increasing darkness; whilst, at long intervals, the large globes of the electric lights shone as brightly as the moons of the city's cloudless nights.

But why was he, Pierre, there, he asked himself, irritated and wondering. Since Laveuve was dead he had but to go home, bury himself in his nook, and close up door and windows, like one who was henceforth useless, who had neither belief nor hope, and awaited naught save annihilation. It was a long journey from the Place de l'Opera to his little house at Neuilly. Still, however great his weariness, he would not take a cab, but retraced his steps, turning towards the Madeleine again, and plunging into the scramble of the pavements, amidst the deafening uproar from the roadway, with a bitter desire to aggravate his wound and saturate himself with revolt and anger. Was it not yonder at the corner of that street, at the end of that Boulevard, that he would find the expected abyss into which that rotten world, whose old society he could hear rending at each step, must soon assuredly topple?

However, when Pierre wished to cross the Rue Scribe a block in the traffic made him halt. In front of a luxurious cafe two tall, shabbily-clad and very dirty fellows were alternately offering the "Voix du Peuple" with its account of the scandals and the bribe-takers of the Chamber and the Senate, in voices so suggestive of cracked brass that passers-by clustered around them. And here, in a hesitating, wandering man, who after listening drew near to the large cafe and peered through its windows, Pierre was once again amazed to recognise Salvat. This time the meeting struck him forcibly, filled him with suspicion to such a point that he also stopped and resolved to watch the journeyman engineer. He did not expect that one of such wretched aspect, with what seemed to be a hunk of bread distending his old ragged jacket, would enter and seat himself at one of the cafe's little tables amidst the warm gaiety of the lamps. However, he waited for a moment, and then saw him wander away with slow and broken steps as if the cafe, which was nearly empty, did not suit him. What could he have been seeking, whither had he been going, since the morning, ever on a wild, solitary chase through the Paris of wealth and enjoyment while hunger dogged his steps? It was only with difficulty that he now dragged himself along, his will and energy seemed to be exhausted. As if quite overcome, he drew near to a kiosk, and for a moment leant against it. Then, however, he drew himself up again, and walked on further, still as it were in search of something.

And now came an incident which brought Pierre's emotion to a climax. A tall sturdy man on turning out of the Rue Caumartin caught sight of Salvat, and approached him. And just as the new comer without false pride was shaking the workman's hand, Pierre recognised him as his brother Guillaume. Yes, it was indeed he, with his thick bushy hair already white like snow, though he was but seven and forty. However, his heavy moustaches had remained quite dark without one silver thread, thus lending an expression of vigorous life to his full face with its lofty towering brow. It was from his father that he had inherited that brow of impregnable logic and reason, similar to that which Pierre himself possessed. But the lower part of the elder brother's countenance was fuller than that of his junior; his nose was larger, his chin was square, and his mouth broad and firm of contour. A pale scar, the mark of an old wound, streaked his left temple. And his physiognomy, though it might at

first seem very grave, rough, and unexpansive, beamed with masculine kindliness whenever a smile revealed his teeth, which had remained extremely white.

While looking at his brother, Pierre remembered what Madame Theodore had told him that morning. Guillaume, touched by Salvat's dire want, had arranged to give him a few days' employment. And this explained the air of interest with which he now seemed to be questioning him, while the engineer, whom the meeting disturbed, stamped about as if eager to resume his mournful ramble. For a moment Guillaume appeared to notice the other's perturbation, by the embarrassed answers which he obtained from him. Still, they at last parted as if each were going his way. Then, however, almost immediately, Guillaume turned round again and watched the other, as with harassed stubborn mien he went off through the crowd. And the thoughts which had come to Guillaume must have been very serious and very pressing, for he all at once began to retrace his steps and follow the workman from a distance, as if to ascertain for certain what direction he would take.

Pierre had watched the scene with growing disquietude. His nervous apprehension of some great unknown calamity, the suspicions born of his frequent and inexplicable meetings with Salvat, his surprise at now seeing his brother mingled with the affair, all helped to fill him with a pressing desire to know, witness, and perhaps prevent. So he did not hesitate, but began to follow the others in a prudent way.

Fresh perturbation came upon him when first Salvat and then Guillaume suddenly turned into the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy. What destiny was thus bringing him back to that street whither a little time previously he had wished to return in feverish haste, and whence only the death of Laveuve had kept him? And his consternation increased yet further when, after losing sight of Salvat for a moment, he saw him standing in front of the Duvillard mansion, on the same spot where he had fancied he recognised him that morning. As it happened the carriage entrance of the mansion was wide open. Some repairs had been made to the paving of the porch, and although the workmen had now gone off, the doorway remained gaping, full of the falling night. The narrow street, running from the glittering Boulevard, was steeped in bluish gloom, starred at long intervals by a few gas-lamps. Some women went by, compelling Salvat to step off the foot-pavement. But he returned to it again, lighted the stump of a cigar, some remnant which he had found under a table outside a cafe, and then resumed his watch, patient and motionless, in front of the mansion.

Disturbed by his dim conjectures, Pierre gradually grew frightened, and asked himself if he ought not to approach that man. The chief thing that detained him was the presence of his brother, whom he had seen disappear into a neighbouring doorway, whence he also was observing the engineer, ready to intervene. And so Pierre contented himself with not losing sight of Salvat, who was still waiting and watching, merely taking his eyes from the mansion in order to glance towards the Boulevard as though he expected someone or something which would come from that direction. And at last, indeed, the Duvillards' landau appeared, with coachman and footman in livery of green and gold – a closed landau to which a pair of tall horses of superb build were harnessed in stylish fashion.

Contrary to custom, however, the carriage, which at that hour usually brought the father and mother home, was only occupied that evening by the son and daughter, Hyacinthe and Camille. Returning from the Princess de Harn's *matinee*, they were chatting freely, with that calm immodesty by which they sought to astonish one another. Hyacinthe, influenced by his perverted ideas, was attacking women, whilst Camille openly counselled him to respond to the Princess's advances. However, she was visibly irritated and feverish that evening, and, suddenly changing the subject, she began to speak of their mother and Gerard de Quinsac.

"But what can it matter to you?" quietly retorted Hyacinthe; and, seeing that she almost bounded from the seat at this remark, he continued: "Are you still in love with him, then? Do you still want to marry him?"

"Yes, I do, and I will!" she cried with all the jealous rage of an uncomely girl, who suffered so acutely at seeing herself spurned whilst her yet beautiful mother stole from her the man she wanted.

"You will, you will!" resumed Hyacinthe, well pleased to have an opportunity of teasing his sister, whom he somewhat feared. "But you won't unless *he* is willing – And he doesn't care for you."

"He does!" retorted Camille in a fury. "He's kind and pleasant with me, and that's enough."

Her brother felt afraid as he noticed the blackness of her glance, and the clenching of her weak little hands, whose fingers bent like claws. And after a pause he asked: "And papa, what does he say about it?"

"Oh, papa! All that he cares about is the other one."

Then Hyacinthe began to laugh.

But the landau, with its tall horses trotting on sonorously, had turned into the street and was approaching the house, when a slim fair-haired girl of sixteen or seventeen, a modiste's errand girl with a large bandbox on her arm, hastily crossed the road in order to enter the arched doorway before the carriage. She was bringing a bonnet for the Baroness, and had come all along the Boulevard musing, with her soft blue eyes, her pinky nose, and her mouth which ever laughed in the most adorable little face that one could see. And it was at this same moment that Salvat, after another glance at the landau, sprang forward and entered the doorway. An instant afterwards he reappeared, flung his lighted cigar stump into the gutter; and without undue haste went off, slinking into the depths of the vague gloom of the street.

And then what happened? Pierre, later on, remembered that a dray of the Western Railway Company in coming up stopped and delayed the landau for a moment, whilst the young errand girl entered the doorway. And with a heart-pang beyond description he saw his brother Guillaume in his turn spring forward and rush into the mansion as though impelled to do so by some revelation, some sudden certainty. He, Pierre, though he understood nothing clearly, could divine the approach of some frightful horror. But when he would have run, when he would have shouted, he found himself as if nailed to the pavement, and felt his throat clutched as by a hand of lead. Then suddenly came a thunderous roar, a formidable explosion, as if the earth was opening, and the lightning-struck mansion was being annihilated. Every window-pane of the neighbouring houses was shivered, the glass raining down with the loud clatter of hail. For a moment a hellish flame fired the street, and the dust and the smoke were such that the few passers-by were blinded and howled with affright, aghast at toppling, as they thought, into that fiery furnace.

And that dazzling flare brought Pierre enlightenment. He once more saw the bomb distending the tool-bag, which lack of work had emptied and rendered useless. He once more saw it under the ragged jacket, a protuberance caused, he had fancied, by some hunk of bread, picked up in a corner and treasured that it might be carried home to wife and child. After wandering and threatening all happy Paris, it was there that it had flared, there that it had burst with a thunder-clap, there on the threshold of the sovereign *bourgeoisie* to whom all wealth belonged. He, however, at that moment thought only of his brother Guillaume, and flung himself into that porch where a volcanic crater seemed to have opened. And at first he distinguished nothing, the acrid smoke streamed over all. Then he perceived the walls split, the upper floor rent open, the paving broken up, strewn with fragments. Outside, the landau which had been on the point of entering, had escaped all injury; neither of the horses had been touched, nor was there even a scratch on any panel of the vehicle. But the young girl, the pretty, slim, fair-haired errand girl, lay there on her back, her stomach ripped open, whilst her delicate face remained intact, her eyes clear, her smile full of astonishment, so swiftly and lightning-like had come the catastrophe. And near her, from the fallen bandbox, whose lid had merely come unfastened, had rolled the bonnet, a very fragile pink bonnet, which still looked charming in its flowery freshness.

By a prodigy Guillaume was alive and already on his legs again. His left hand alone streamed with blood, a projectile seemed to have broken his wrist. His moustaches moreover had been burnt, and the explosion by throwing him to the ground had so shaken and bruised him that he shivered from head to feet as with intense cold. Nevertheless, he recognised his brother without even feeling

astonished to see him there, as indeed often happens after great disasters, when the unexplained becomes providential. That brother, of whom he had so long lost sight, was there, naturally enough, because it was necessary that he should be there. And Guillaume, amidst the wild quivers by which he was shaken, at once cried to him “Take me away! take me away! To your house at Neuilly, oh! take me away!”

Then, for sole explanation, and referring to Salvat, he stammered: “I suspected that he had stolen a cartridge from me; only one, most fortunately, for otherwise the whole district would have been blown to pieces. Ah! the wretched fellow! I wasn’t in time to set my foot upon the match.”

With perfect lucidity of mind, such as danger sometimes imparts, Pierre, neither speaking nor losing a moment, remembered that the mansion had a back entrance fronting the Rue Vignon. He had just realised in what serious peril his brother would be if he were found mixed up in that affair. And with all speed, when he had led him into the gloom of the Rue Vignon, he tied his handkerchief round his wrist, which he bade him press to his chest, under his coat, as that would conceal it.

But Guillaume, still shivering and haunted by the horror he had witnessed, repeated: “Take me away – to your place at Neuilly – not to my home.”

“Of course, of course, be easy. Come, wait here a second, I will stop a cab.”

In his eagerness to procure a conveyance, Pierre had brought his brother down to the Boulevard again. But the terrible thunderclap of the explosion had upset the whole neighbourhood, horses were still rearing, and people were running demented, hither and thither. And numerous policemen had hastened up, and a rushing crowd was already blocking the lower part of the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy, which was now as black as a pit, every light in it having been extinguished; whilst on the Boulevard a hawker of the “Voix du Peuple” still stubbornly vociferated: “The new scandal of the African Railway Lines! The thirty-two bribe-takers of the Chamber and the Senate! The approaching fall of the ministry!”

Pierre was at last managing to stop a cab when he heard a person who ran by say to another, “The ministry? Ah, well! that bomb will mend it right enough!”

Then the brothers seated themselves in the cab, which carried them away. And now, over the whole of rumbling Paris black night had gathered, an unforgiving night, in which the stars foundered amidst the mist of crime and anger that had risen from the house-roofs. The great cry of justice swept by amidst the same terrifying flapping of wings which Sodom and Gomorrah once heard bearing down upon them from all the black clouds of the horizon.

BOOK II

I. REVOLUTIONISTS

IN that out-of-the-way street at Neuilly, along which nobody passed after dusk, Pierre's little house was now steeped in deep slumber under the black sky; each of its shutters closed, and not a ray of light stealing forth from within. And one could divine, too, the profound quietude of the little garden in the rear, a garden empty and lifeless, benumbed by the winter cold.

Pierre had several times feared that his brother would faint away in the cab in which they were journeying. Leaning back, and often sinking down, Guillaume spoke not a word. And terrible was the silence between them – a silence fraught with all the questions and answers which they felt it would be useless and painful to exchange at such a time. However, the priest was anxious about the wound, and wondered to what surgeon he might apply, desirous as he was of admitting only a sure, staunch man into the secret, for he had noticed with how keen a desire to disappear his brother had sought to hide himself.

Until they reached the Arc de Triomphe the silence remained unbroken. It was only there that Guillaume seemed to emerge from the prostration of his reverie. "Mind, Pierre," said he, "no doctor. We will attend to this together."

Pierre was on the point of protesting, but he realised that it would be useless to discuss the subject at such a moment, and so he merely waved his hand to signify that he should act in spite of the prohibition were it necessary. In point of fact, his anxiety had increased, and, when the cab at last drew up before the house, it was with real relief that he saw his brother alight without evincing any marked feebleness. He himself quickly paid the driver, well-pleased, too, at finding that nobody, not even a neighbour, was about. And having opened the door with his latch key, he helped the injured man to ascend the steps.

A little night lamp glimmered faintly in the vestibule. On hearing the door open, Pierre's servant, Sophie, had at once emerged from the kitchen. A short, thin, dark woman of sixty, she had formed part of the household for more than thirty years, having served the mother before serving the son. She knew Guillaume, having seen him when he was a young man, and doubtless she now recognised him, although well-nigh ten years had gone by since he had last crossed that threshold. Instead of evincing any surprise, she seemed to consider his extraordinary return quite natural, and remained as silent and discreet as usual. She led, indeed, the life of a recluse, never speaking unless her work absolutely required it. And thus she now contented herself with saying: "Monsieur l'Abbe, Monsieur Bertheroy is in the study, and has been waiting there for a quarter of an hour."

At this Guillaume intervened, as if the news revived him: "Does Bertheroy still come here, then? I'll see him willingly. His is one of the best, the broadest, minds of these days. He has still remained my master."

A former friend of their father, – the illustrious chemist, Michel Froment, – Bertheroy had now, in his turn, become one of the loftiest glories of France, one to whom chemistry owed much of the extraordinary progress that has made it the mother-science, by which the very face of the earth is being changed. A member of the Institute, laden with offices and honours, he had retained much affection for Pierre, and occasionally visited him in this wise before dinner, by way of relaxation, he would say.

"You showed him into the study? All right, then, we will go there," said the Abbe to the servant. "Light a lamp and take it into my room, and get my bed ready so that my brother may go to bed at once."

While Sophie, without a word or sign of surprise, was obeying these instructions, the brothers went into their father's former laboratory, of which the priest had now made a spacious study. And it was with a cry of joyous astonishment that the *savant* greeted them on seeing them enter the room side by side, the one supporting the other. "What, together!" he exclaimed. "Ah! my dear children, you could not have caused me greater pleasure! I who have so often deplored your painful misunderstanding."

Bertheroy was a tall and lean septuagenarian, with angular features. His yellow skin clung like parchment to the projecting bones of his cheeks and jaw. Moreover, there was nothing imposing about him; he looked like some old shop-keeping herbalist. At the same time he had a fine, broad, smooth brow, and his eyes still glittered brightly beneath his tangled hair.

"What, have you injured yourself, Guillaume?" he continued, as soon as he saw the bandaged hand.

Pierre remained silent, so as to let his brother tell the story as he chose. Guillaume had realised that he must confess the truth, but in simple fashion, without detailing the circumstances. "Yes, in an explosion," he answered, "and I really think that I have my wrist broken."

At this, Bertheroy, whose glance was fixed upon him, noticed that his moustaches were burnt, and that there was an expression of bewildered stupor, such as follows a catastrophe, in his eyes. Forthwith the *savant* became grave and circumspect; and, without seeking to compel confidence by any questions, he simply said: "Indeed! an explosion! Will you let me see the injury? You know that before letting chemistry ensnare me I studied medicine, and am still somewhat of a surgeon."

On hearing these words Pierre could not restrain a heart-cry: "Yes, yes, master! Look at the injury – I was very anxious, and to find you here is unhoped-for good fortune!"

The *savant* glanced at him, and divined that the hidden circumstances of the accident must be serious. And then, as Guillaume, smiling, though paling with weakness, consented to the suggestion, Bertheroy retorted that before anything else he must be put to bed. The servant just then returned to say the bed was ready, and so they all went into the adjoining room, where the injured man was soon undressed and helped between the sheets.

"Light me, Pierre," said Bertheroy, "take the lamp; and let Sophie give me a basin full of water and some cloths." Then, having gently washed the wound, he resumed: "The devil! The wrist isn't broken, but it's a nasty injury. I am afraid there must be a lesion of the bone. Some nails passed through the flesh, did they not?"

Receiving no reply, he relapsed into silence. But his surprise was increasing, and he closely examined the hand, which the flame of the explosion had scorched, and even sniffed the shirt cuff as if seeking to understand the affair better. He evidently recognised the effects of one of those new explosives which he himself had studied, almost created. In the present case, however, he must have been puzzled, for there were characteristic signs and traces the significance of which escaped him.

"And so," he at last made up his mind to ask, carried away by professional curiosity, "and so it was a laboratory explosion which put you in this nice condition? What devilish powder were you concocting then?"

Guillaume, ever since he had seen Bertheroy thus studying his injury, had, in spite of his sufferings, given marked signs of annoyance and agitation. And as if the real secret which he wished to keep lay precisely in the question now put to him, in that powder, the first experiment with which had thus injured him, he replied with an air of restrained ardour, and a straight frank glance: "Pray do not question me, master. I cannot answer you. You have, I know, sufficient nobility of nature to nurse me and care for me without exacting a confession."

"Oh! certainly, my friend," exclaimed Bertheroy; "keep your secret. Your discovery belongs to you if you have made one; and I know that you are capable of putting it to the most generous use. Besides, you must be aware that I have too great a passion for truth to judge the actions of others, whatever their nature, without knowing every circumstance and motive."

So saying, he waved his hand as if to indicate how broadly tolerant and free from error and superstition was that lofty sovereign mind of his, which in spite of all the orders that bedizened him, in spite of all the academical titles that he bore as an official *savant*, made him a man of the boldest and most independent views, one whose only passion was truth, as he himself said.

He lacked the necessary appliances to do more than dress the wound, after making sure that no fragment of any projectile had remained in the flesh. Then he at last went off, promising to return at an early hour on the morrow; and, as the priest escorted him to the street door, he spoke some comforting words: if the bone had not been deeply injured all would be well.

On returning to the bedside, Pierre found his brother still sitting up and seeking fresh energy in his desire to write home and tranquillise his loved ones. So the priest, after providing pen and paper, again had to take up the lamp and light him. Guillaume fortunately retained full use of his right hand, and was thus able to pen a few lines to say that he would not be home that night. He addressed the note to Madame Leroi, the mother of his deceased mistress, who, since the latter's death, had remained with him and had reared his three sons. Pierre was aware also that the household at Montmartre included a young woman of five or six and twenty, the daughter of an old friend, to whom Guillaume had given shelter on her father's death, and whom he was soon to marry, in spite of the great difference in their ages. For the priest, however, all these were vague, disturbing things, condemnable features of disorderly life, and he had invariably pretended to be ignorant of them.

"So you wish this note to be taken to Montmartre at once?" he said to his brother.

"Yes, at once. It is scarcely more than seven o'clock now, and it will be there by eight. And you will choose a reliable man, won't you?"

"The best course will be for Sophie to take a cab. We need have no fear with her. She won't chatter. Wait a moment, and I will settle everything."

Sophie, on being summoned, at once understood what was wanted of her, and promised to say, in reply to any questions, that M. Guillaume had come to spend the night at his brother's, for reasons which she did not know. And without indulging in any reflections herself, she left the house, saying simply: "Monsieur l'Abbe's dinner is ready; he will only have to take the broth and the stew off the stove."

However, when Pierre this time returned to the bedside to sit down there, he found that Guillaume had fallen back with his head resting on both pillows. And he looked very weary and pale, and showed signs of fever. The lamp, standing on a corner of a side table, cast a soft light around, and so deep was the quietude that the big clock in the adjoining dining-room could be heard ticking. For a moment the silence continued around the two brothers, who, after so many years of separation, were at last re-united and alone together. Then the injured man brought his right hand to the edge of the sheet, and the priest grasped it, pressed it tenderly in his own. And the clasp was a long one, those two brotherly hands remaining locked, one in the other.

"My poor little Pierre," Guillaume faintly murmured, "you must forgive me for falling on you in this fashion. I've invaded the house and taken your bed, and I'm preventing you from dining."

"Don't talk, don't tire yourself any more," interrupted Pierre. "Is not this the right place for you when you are in trouble?"

A warmer pressure came from Guillaume's feverish hand, and tears gathered in his eyes. "Thanks, my little Pierre. I've found you again, and you are as gentle and loving as you always were. Ah! you cannot know how delightful it seems to me."

Then the priest's eyes also were dimmed by tears. Amidst the deep quietude, the great sense of comfort which had followed their violent emotion, the brothers found an infinite charm in being together once more in the home of their childhood.[5] It was there that both their father and mother had died – the father tragically, struck down by an explosion in his laboratory; the mother piously, like

[5] See M. Zola's "Lourdes," Day I., Chapter II.

a very saint. It was there, too, in that same bed, that Guillaume had nursed Pierre, when, after their mother's death, the latter had nearly died; and it was there now that Pierre in his turn was nursing Guillaume. All helped to bow them down and fill them with emotion: the strange circumstances of their meeting, the frightful catastrophe which had caused them such a shock, the mysteriousness of the things which remained unexplained between them. And now that after so long a separation they were tragically brought together again, they both felt their memory awaking. The old house spoke to them of their childhood, of their parents dead and gone, of the far-away days when they had loved and suffered there. Beneath the window lay the garden, now icy cold, which once, under the sunbeams, had re-echoed with their play. On the left was the laboratory, the spacious room where their father had taught them to read. On the right, in the dining-room, they could picture their mother cutting bread and butter for them, and looking so gentle with her big, despairing eyes – those of a believer mated to an infidel. And the feeling that they were now alone in that home, and the pale, sleepy gleam of the lamp, and the deep silence of the garden and the house, and the very past itself, all filled them with the softest of emotion blended with the keenest bitterness.

They would have liked to talk and unbosom themselves. But what could they say to one another? Although their hands remained so tightly clasped, did not the most impassable of chasms separate them? In any case, they thought so. Guillaume was convinced that Pierre was a saint, a priest of the most robust faith, without a doubt, without aught in common with himself, whether in the sphere of ideas or in that of practical life. A hatchet-stroke had parted them, and each lived in a different world. And in the same way Pierre pictured Guillaume as one who had lost caste, whose conduct was most suspicious, who had never even married the mother of his three children, but was on the point of marrying that girl who was far too young for him, and who had come nobody knew whence. In him, moreover, were blended the passionate ideas of a *savant* and a revolutionist, ideas in which one found negation of everything, acceptance and possibly provocation of the worst forms of violence, with a glimpse of the vague monster of Anarchism underlying all. And so, on what basis could there be any understanding between them, since each retained his prejudices against the other, and saw him on the opposite side of the chasm, without possibility of any plank being thrown across it to enable them to unite? Thus, all alone in that room, their poor hearts bled with distracted brotherly love.

Pierre knew that, on a previous occasion, Guillaume had narrowly escaped being compromised in an Anarchist affair. He asked him no questions, but he could not help reflecting that he would not have hidden himself in this fashion had he not feared arrest for complicity. Complicity with Salvat? Was he really an accomplice? Pierre shuddered, for the only materials on which he could found a contrary opinion were, on one hand, the words that had escaped his brother after the crime, the cry he had raised accusing Salvat of having stolen a cartridge from him; and, on the other hand, his heroic rush into the doorway of the Duvillard mansion in order to extinguish the match. A great deal still remained obscure; but if a cartridge of that frightful explosive had been stolen from Guillaume the fact must be that he manufactured such cartridges and had others at home. Of course, even if he were not an accomplice, the injury to his wrist had made it needful for him to disappear. Given his bleeding hand, and the previous suspicions levelled against him, he would never have convinced anybody of his innocence. And yet, even allowing for these surmises, the affair remained wrapt in darkness: a crime on Guillaume's part seemed a possibility, and to Pierre it was all dreadful to think of.

Guillaume, by the trembling of his brother's moist, yielding hand, must in some degree have realised the prostration of his poor mind, already shattered by doubt and finished off by this calamity. Indeed, the sepulchre was empty now, the very ashes had been swept out of it.

"My poor little Pierre," the elder brother slowly said. "Forgive me if I do not tell you anything. I cannot do so. And besides, what would be the use of it? We should certainly not understand one another… So let us keep from saying anything, and let us simply enjoy the delight of being together and loving one another in spite of all."

Pierre raised his eyes, and for a long time their glances lingered, one fixed on the other. “Ah!” stammered the priest, “how frightful it all is!”

Guillaume, however, had well understood the mute inquiry of Pierre’s eyes. His own did not waver but replied boldly, beaming with purity and loftiness: “I can tell you nothing. Yet, all the same, let us love each other, my little Pierre.”

And then Pierre for a moment felt that his brother was above all base anxiety, above the guilty fear of the man who trembles for himself. In lieu thereof he seemed to be carried away by the passion of some great design, the noble thought of concealing some sovereign idea, some secret which it was imperative for him to save. But, alas! this was only the fleeting vision of a vague hope; for all vanished, and again came the doubt, the suspicion, of a mind dealing with one that it knew nothing of.

And all at once a souvenir, a frightful spectacle, arose before Pierre’s eyes and distracted him: “Did you see, brother,” he stammered, “did you see that fair-haired girl lying under the archway, ripped open, with a smile of astonishment on her face?”

Guillaume in his turn quivered, and in a low and dolorous voice replied: “Yes, I saw her! Ah, poor little thing! Ah! the atrocious necessities, the atrocious errors, of justice!”

Then, amidst the frightful shudder that seemed to sweep by, Pierre, with his horror of all violence, succumbed, and let his face sink upon the counterpane at the edge of the bed. And he sobbed distractedly: a sudden attack of weakness, overflowing in tears, cast him there exhausted, with no more strength than a child. It was as if all his sufferings since the morning, the deep grief with which universal injustice and woe inspired him, were bursting forth in that flood of tears which nothing now could stay. And Guillaume, who, to calm his little brother, had set his hand upon his head, in the same way as he had often caressingly stroked his hair in childhood’s days, likewise felt upset and remained silent, unable to find a word of consolation, resigned, as he was, to the eruption which in life is always possible, the cataclysm by which the slow evolution of nature is always liable to be precipitated. But how hard a fate for the wretched ones whom the lava sweeps away in millions! And then his tears also began to flow amidst the profound silence.

“Pierre,” he gently exclaimed at last, “you must have some dinner. Go, go and have some. And screen the lamp; leave me by myself, and let me close my eyes. It will do me good.”

Pierre had to content him. Still, he left the dining-room door open; and, weak for want of food, though he had not hitherto noticed it, he ate standing, with his ears on the alert, listening lest his brother should complain or call him. And the silence seemed to have become yet more complete, the little house sank, as it were, into annihilation, instinct with all the melancholy charm of the past.

At about half-past eight, when Sophie returned from her errand to Montmartre, Guillaume heard her step, light though it was. And he at once became restless and wanted to know what news she brought. It was Pierre, however, who enlightened him. “Don’t be anxious. Sophie was received by an old lady who, after reading your note, merely answered, ‘Very well.’ She did not even ask Sophie a question, but remained quite composed without sign of curiosity.”

Guillaume, realising that this fine serenity perplexed his brother, thereupon replied with similar calmness: “Oh! it was only necessary that grandmother should be warned. She knows well enough that if I don’t return home it is because I can’t.”

However, from that moment it was impossible for the injured man to rest. Although the lamp was hidden away in a corner, he constantly opened his eyes, glanced round him, and seemed to listen, as if for sounds from the direction of Paris. And it at last became necessary for the priest to summon the servant and ask her if she had noticed anything strange on her way to or from Montmartre. She seemed surprised by the question, and answered that she had noticed nothing. Besides, the cab had followed the outer boulevards, which were almost deserted. A slight fog had again begun to fall, and the streets were steeped in icy dampness.

By the time it was nine o’clock Pierre realised that his brother would never be able to sleep if he were thus left without news. Amidst his growing feverishness the injured man experienced keen

anxiety, a haunting desire to know if Salvat were arrested and had spoken out. He did not confess this; indeed he sought to convey the impression that he had no personal disquietude, which was doubtless true. But his great secret was stifling him; he shuddered at the thought that his lofty scheme, all his labour and all his hope, should be at the mercy of that unhappy man whom want had filled with delusions and who had sought to set justice upon earth by the aid of a bomb. And in vain did the priest try to make Guillaume understand that nothing certain could yet be known. He perceived that his impatience increased every minute, and at last resolved to make some effort to satisfy him.

But where could he go, of whom could he inquire? Guillaume, while talking and trying to guess with whom Salvat might have sought refuge, had mentioned Janzen, the Princess de Harn's mysterious lover; and for a moment he had even thought of sending to this man for information. But he reflected that if Janzen had heard of the explosion he was not at all the individual to wait for the police at home.

Meantime Pierre repeated: "I will willingly go to buy the evening papers for you – but there will certainly be nothing in them. Although I know almost everyone in Neuilly I can think of nobody who is likely to have any information, unless perhaps it were Bache – "

"You know Bache, the municipal councillor?" interrupted Guillaume.

"Yes, we have both had to busy ourselves with charitable work in the neighbourhood."

"Well, Bache is an old friend of mine, and I know no safer man. Pray go to him and bring him back with you."

A quarter of an hour later Pierre returned with Bache, who resided in a neighbouring street. And it was not only Bache whom he brought with him, for, much to his surprise, he had found Janzen at Bache's house. As Guillaume had suspected, Janzen, while dining at the Princess de Harn's, had heard of the crime, and had consequently refrained from returning to his little lodging in the Rue des Martyrs, where the police might well have set a trap for him. His connections were known, and he was aware that he was watched and was liable at any moment to arrest or expulsion as a foreign Anarchist. And so he had thought it prudent to solicit a few days' hospitality of Bache, a very upright and obliging man, to whom he entrusted himself without fear. He would never have remained with Rosemonde, that adorable lunatic who for a month past had been exhibiting him as her lover, and whose useless and dangerous extravagance of conduct he fully realised.

Guillaume was so delighted on seeing Bache and Janzen that he wished to sit up in bed again. But Pierre bade him remain quiet, rest his head on the pillows, and speak as little as possible. Then, while Janzen stood near, erect and silent, Bache took a chair and sat down by the bedside with many expressions of friendly interest. He was a stout man of sixty, with a broad, full face, a large white beard and long white hair. His little, gentle eyes had a dim, dreamy expression, while a pleasant, hopeful smile played round his thick lips. His father, a fervent St. Simonian, had brought him up in the doctrines of that belief. While retaining due respect for it, however, his personal inclinations towards orderliness and religion had led him to espouse the ideas of Fourier, in such wise that one found in him a succession and an abridgment, so to say, of two doctrines. Moreover, when he was about thirty, he had busied himself with spiritualism. Possessed of a comfortable little fortune, his only adventure in life had been his connection with the Paris Commune of 1871. How or why he had become a member of it he could now scarcely tell. Condemned to death by default, although he had sat among the Moderates, he had resided in Belgium until the amnesty; and since then Neuilly had elected him as its representative on the Paris Municipal Council, less by way of glorifying in him a victim of reaction than as a reward for his worthiness, for he was really esteemed by the whole district.

Guillaume, with his desire for tidings, was obliged to confide in his two visitors, tell them of the explosion and Salvat's flight, and how he himself had been wounded while seeking to extinguish the match. Janzen, with curly beard and hair, and a thin, fair face such as painters often attribute to the Christ, listened coldly, as was his wont, and at last said slowly in a gentle voice: "Ah! so it was Salvat! I thought it might be little Mathis – I'm surprised that it should be Salvat – for he hadn't made

up his mind." Then, as Guillaume anxiously inquired if he thought that Salvat would speak out, he began to protest: "Oh! no; oh! no."

However, he corrected himself with a gleam of disdain in his clear, harsh eyes: "After all, there's no telling. Salvat is a man of sentiment."

Then Bache, who was quite upset by the news of the explosion, tried to think how his friend Guillaume, to whom he was much attached, might be extricated from any charge of complicity should he be denounced. And Guillaume, at sight of Janzen's contemptuous coldness, must have suffered keenly, for the other evidently believed him to be trembling, tortured by the one desire to save his own skin. But what could he say, how could he reveal the deep concern which rendered him so feverish without betraying the secret which he had hidden even from his brother?

However, at this moment Sophie came to tell her master that M. Theophile Morin had called with another gentleman. Much astonished by this visit at so late an hour, Pierre hastened into the next room to receive the new comers. He had become acquainted with Morin since his return from Rome, and had helped him to introduce a translation of an excellent scientific manual, prepared according to the official programmes, into the Italian schools.[6] A Franc-Comtois by birth, a compatriot of Proudhon, with whose poor family he had been intimate at Besancon, Morin, himself the son of a journeyman clockmaker, had grown up with Proudhonian ideas, full of affection for the poor and an instinctive hatred of property and wealth. Later on, having come to Paris as a school teacher, impassioned by study, he had given his whole mind to Auguste Comte. Beneath the fervent Positivist, however, one might yet find the old Proudhonian, the pauper who rebelled and detested want. Moreover, it was scientific Positivism that he clung to; in his hatred of all mysticism he would have naught to do with the fantastic religious leanings of Comte in his last years. And in Morin's brave, consistent, somewhat mournful life, there had been but one page of romance: the sudden feverish impulse which had carried him off to fight in Sicily by Garibaldi's side. Afterwards he had again become a petty professor in Paris, obscurely earning a dismal livelihood.

When Pierre returned to the bedroom he said to his brother in a tone of emotion: "Morin has brought me Barthes, who fancies himself in danger and asks my hospitality."

At this Guillaume forgot himself and became excited: "Nicholas Barthes, a hero with a soul worthy of antiquity. Oh! I know him; I admire and love him. You must set your door open wide for him."

Bache and Janzen, however, had glanced at one another smiling. And the latter, with his cold ironical air, slowly remarked: "Why does Monsieur Barthes hide himself? A great many people think he is dead; he is simply a ghost who no longer frightens anybody."

Four and seventy years of age as he now was, Barthes had spent nearly half a century in prison. He was the eternal prisoner, the hero of liberty whom each successive Government had carried from citadel to fortress. Since his youth he had been marching on amidst his dream of fraternity, fighting for an ideal Republic based on truth and justice, and each and every endeavour had led him to a dungeon; he had invariably finished his humanitarian reverie under bolts and bars. Carbonaro, Republican, evangelical sectarian, he had conspired at all times and in all places, incessantly struggling against the Power of the day, whatever it might be. And when the Republic at last had come, that Republic which had cost him so many years of gaol, it had, in its own turn, imprisoned him, adding fresh years of gloom to those which already had lacked sunlight. And thus he remained the martyr of freedom: freedom which he still desired in spite of everything; freedom, which, strive as he might, never came, never existed.

"But you are mistaken," replied Guillaume, wounded by Janzen's raillery. "There is again a thought of getting rid of Barthes, whose uncompromising rectitude disturbs our politicians; and he does well to take his precautions!"

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[6] See M. Zola's "Rome," Chapters IV. and XVI.

Nicholas Barthes came in, a tall, slim, withered old man, with a nose like an eagle's beak, and eyes that still burned in their deep sockets, under white and bushy brows. His mouth, toothless but still refined, was lost to sight between his moustaches and snowy beard; and his hair, crowning him whitely like an aureola, fell in curls over his shoulders. Behind him with all modesty came Theophile Morin, with grey whiskers, grey, brush-like hair, spectacles, and yellow, weary mien – that of an old professor exhausted by years of teaching. Neither of them seemed astonished or awaited an explanation on finding that man in bed with an injured wrist. And there were no introductions: those who were acquainted merely smiled at one another.

Barthes, for his part, stooped and kissed Guillaume on both cheeks. "Ah!" said the latter, almost gaily, "it gives me courage to see you."

However, the new comers had brought a little information. The boulevards were in an agitated state, the news of the crime had spread from cafe to cafe, and everybody was anxious to see the late edition which one paper had published giving a very incorrect account of the affair, full of the most extraordinary details. Briefly, nothing positive was as yet known.

On seeing Guillaume turn pale Pierre compelled him to lie down again, and even talked of taking the visitors into the next room. But the injured man gently replied: "No, no, I promise you that I won't stir again, that I won't open my mouth. But stay there and chat together. I assure you that it will do me good to have you near me and hear you."

Then, under the sleepy gleams of the lamp, the others began to talk in undertones. Old Barthes, who considered that bomb to be both idiotic and abominable, spoke of it with the stupefaction of one who, after fighting like a hero through all the legendary struggles for liberty, found himself belated, out of his element, in a new era, which he could not understand. Did not the conquest of freedom suffice for everything? he added. Was there any other problem beyond that of founding the real Republic? Then, referring to Mege and his speech in the Chamber that afternoon, he bitterly arraigned Collectivism, which he declared to be one of the democratic forms of tyranny. Theophile Morin, for his part, also spoke against the Collectivist enrolling of the social forces, but he professed yet greater hatred of the odious violence of the Anarchists; for it was only by evolution that he expected progress, and he felt somewhat indifferent as to what political means might bring about the scientific society of to-morrow. And in like way Bache did not seem particularly fond of the Anarchists, though he was touched by the idyllic dream, the humanitarian hope, whose germs lay beneath their passion for destruction. And, like Barthes, he also flew into a passion with Mege, who since entering the Chamber had become, said he, a mere rhetorician and theorist, dreaming of dictatorship. Meantime Janzen, still erect, his face frigid and his lips curling ironically, listened to all three of them, and vented a few trenchant words to express his own Anarchist faith; the uselessness of drawing distinctions, and the necessity of destroying everything in order that everything might be rebuilt on fresh lines.

Pierre, who had remained near the bed, also listened with passionate attention. Amidst the downfall of his own beliefs, the utter void which he felt within him, here were these four men, who represented the cardinal points of this century's ideas, debating the very same terrible problem which brought him so much suffering, that of the new belief which the democracy of the coming century awaits. And, ah! since the days of the immediate ancestors, since the days of Voltaire and Diderot and Rousseau how incessantly had billows of ideas followed and jostled one another, the older ones giving birth to new ones, and all breaking and bounding in a tempest in which it was becoming so difficult to distinguish anything clearly! Whence came the wind, and whither was the ship of salvation going, for what port ought one to embark? Pierre had already thought that the balance-sheet of the century ought to be drawn up, and that, after accepting the legacies of Rousseau and the other precursors, he ought to study the ideas of St. Simon, Fourier and even Cabet; of Auguste Comte, Proudhon and Karl Marx as well, in order, at any rate, to form some idea of the distance that had been travelled, and of the cross-ways which one had now reached. And was not this an opportunity, since chance

had gathered those men together in his house, living exponents of the conflicting doctrines which he wished to examine?

On turning round, however, he perceived that Guillaume was now very pale and had closed his eyes. Had even he, with his faith in science, felt the doubt which is born of contradictory theories, and the despair which comes when one sees the fight for truth resulting in growth of error?

“Are you in pain?” the priest anxiously inquired.

“Yes, a little. But I will try to sleep.”

At this they all went off with silent handshakes. Nicholas Barthes alone remained in the house and slept in a room on the first floor which Sophie had got ready for him. Pierre, unwilling to quit his brother, dozed off upon a sofa. And the little house relapsed into its deep quietude, the silence of solitude and winter, through which passed the melancholy quiver of the souvenirs of childhood.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.