ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

THE PARISIANS — VOLUME 01

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

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Бульвер-Литтон Э. Д.

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Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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PREFATORY NOTE

(BY THE AUTHOR'S SON.)

"The Parisians" and "Kenelm Chillingly" were begun about the same time, and had their common origin in the same central idea. That idea first found fantastic expression in "The Coming Race;" and the three books, taken together, constitute a special group, distinctly apart from all the other works of their author.

The satire of his earlier novels is a protest against false social respectabilities; the humour of his later ones is a protest against the disrespect of social realities. By the first he sought to promote social sincerity and the free play of personal character; by the last, to encourage mutual charity and sympathy amongst all classes, on whose interrelation depends the character of society itself. But in these three books, his latest fictions, the moral purpose is more definite and exclusive. Each of them is an expostulation against what seemed to him the perilous popularity of certain social and political theories, or a warning against the influence of certain intellectual tendencies upon individual character and national life. This purpose, however, though common to the three fictions, is worked out in each of them by a different method. "The Coming Race" is a work of pure fancy, and the satire of it is vague and sportive. The outlines of a definite purpose are more distinctly drawn in "Chillingly,"—a romance which has the source of its effect in a highly wrought imagination. The humour and pathos of "Chillingly" are of a kind incompatible with the design of "The Parisians," which is a work of dramatized observation. "Chillingly" is a romance; "The Parisians" is a novel. The subject of "Chillingly" is psychological; that of "The Parisians" is social. The author's object in "Chillingly" being to illustrate the effects of "modern ideas" upon an individual character, he has confined his narrative to the biography of that one character; hence the simplicity of plot and small number of dramatis personae, whereby the work gains in height and depth what it loses in breadth of surface. "The Parisians," on the contrary, is designed to illustrate the effect of "modern ideas" upon a whole community. This novel is therefore panoramic in the profusion and variety of figures presented by it to the reader's imagination. No exclusive prominence is vouchsafed to any of these figures. All of them are drawn and coloured with an equal care, but by means of the bold, broad touches necessary for their effective presentation on a canvas so large and so crowded. Such figures are, indeed, but the component features of one great form, and their actions only so many modes of one collective impersonal character,—that of the Parisian Society of Imperial and Democratic France; a character everywhere present and busy throughout the story, of which it is the real hero or heroine. This society was doubtless selected for characteristic illustration as being the most advanced in the progress of "modern ideas." Thus, for a complete perception of its writer's fundamental purpose, "The Parisians" should be read in connection with "Chillingly," and these two books in connection with "The Coming Race." It will then be perceived that through the medium of alternate fancy, sentiment, and observation, assisted by humour and passion, these three books (in all other respects so different from each other) complete the presentation of the same purpose under different aspects, and thereby constitute a group of fictions which claims a separate place of its own in any thoughtful classification of their author's works.

One last word to those who will miss from these pages the connecting and completing touches of the master's hand. It may be hoped that such a disadvantage, though irreparable, is somewhat

mitigated by the essential character of the work itself. The aesthetic merit of this kind of novel is in the vivacity of a general effect produced by large, swift strokes of character; and in such strokes, if they be by a great artist, force and freedom of style must still be apparent, even when they are left rough and unfinished. Nor can any lack of final verbal correction much diminish the intellectual value which many of the more thoughtful passages of the present work derive from a long, keen, and practical study of political phenomena, guided by personal experience of public life, and enlightened by a large, instinctive knowledge of the human heart.

Such a belief is, at least, encouraged by the private communications spontaneously made to him who expresses it, by persons of political experience and social position in France, who have acknowledged the general accuracy of the author's descriptions, and noticed the suggestive sagacity and penetration of his occasional comments on the circumstances and sentiments he describes.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

They who chance to have read the "Coming Race" may perhaps remember that I, the adventurous discoverer of the land without a sun, concluded the sketch of my adventures by a brief reference to the malady which, though giving no perceptible notice of its encroachments, might, in the opinion of my medical attendant, prove suddenly fatal.

I had brought my little book to this somewhat melancholy close a few years before the date of its publication, and in the meanwhile I was induced to transfer my residence to Paris, in order to place myself under the care of an English physician, renowned for his successful treatment of complaints analogous to my own.

I was the more readily persuaded to undertake this journey,—partly because I enjoyed a familiar acquaintance with the eminent physician referred to, who had commenced his career and founded his reputation in the United States; partly because I had become a solitary man, the ties of home broken, and dear friends of mine were domiciled in Paris, with whom I should be sure of tender sympathy and cheerful companionship. I had reason to be thankful for this change of residence: the skill of Dr. C_____ soon restored me to health. Brought much into contact with various circles of Parisian society, I became acquainted with the persons and a witness of the events that form the substance of the tale I am about to submit to the public, which has treated my former book with so generous an indulgence. Sensitively tenacious of that character for strict and unalloyed veracity which, I flatter myself, my account of the abodes and manners of the Vril-ya has established, I could have wished to preserve the following narrative no less jealously guarded than its predecessor from the vagaries of fancy. But Truth undisguised, never welcome in any civilized community above ground, is exposed at this time to especial dangers in Paris; and my life would not be worth an hour's purchase if I exhibited her 'in puris naturalibus' to the eyes of a people wholly unfamiliarized to a spectacle so indecorous. That care for one's personal safety which is the first duty of thoughtful man compels me therefore to reconcile the appearance of 'la Verite' to the 'bienseances' of the polished society in which 'la Liberte' admits no opinion not dressed after the last fashion.

Attired as fiction, Truth may be peacefully received; and, despite the necessity thus imposed by prudence, I indulge the modest hope that I do not in these pages unfaithfully represent certain prominent types of the brilliant population which has invented so many varieties of Koom-Posh;

> [Koom-Posh, Glek-Nas. For the derivation of these terms and their metaphorical signification, I must refer the reader to the "Coming Race," chapter xii., on the language of the Vril-ya. To those who have not read or have forgotten that historical composition, it may be convenient to state briefly that Koom-Posh with the Vril-ya is the name for the government of the many, or the ascendency of the most ignorant or hollow, and may be loosely rendered Hollow-Bosh. When Koom-Posh degenerates from popular ignorance into the popular ferocity which precedes its decease, the name for that state of things is Glek-Nas; namely, the universal strife-rot.]

and even when it appears hopelessly lost in the slough of a Glek-Nas, re-emerges fresh and lively as if from an invigorating plunge into the Fountain of Youth. O Paris, 'foyer des idees, et oeil du monde!'— animated contrast to the serene tranquillity of the Vril-ya, which, nevertheless, thy noisiest philosophers ever pretend to make the goal of their desires: of all communities on which shines the sun and descend the rains of heaven, fertilizing alike wisdom and folly, virtue and vice; in every city men have yet built on this earth,—mayest thou, O Paris, be the last to brave the wands of the Coming Race and be reduced into cinders for the sake of the common good! TISH.

PARIS, August 28, 1872.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

It was a bright day in the early spring of 1869. All Paris seemed to have turned out to enjoy itself. The Tuileries, the Champs Elysees, the Bois de Boulogne, swarmed with idlers. A stranger might have wondered where Toil was at work, and in what nook Poverty lurked concealed. A millionaire from the London Exchange, as he looked round on the magasins, the equipages, the dresses of the women; as he inquired the prices in the shops and the rent of apartments,—might have asked himself, in envious wonder, How on earth do those gay Parisians live? What is their fortune? Where does it come from?

As the day declined, many of the scattered loungers crowded into the Boulevards; the cafes and restaurants began to light up.

About this time a young man, who might be some five or six and twenty, was walking along the Boulevard des Italiens, heeding little the throng through which he glided his solitary way: there was that in his aspect and bearing which caught attention. He looked a somebody; but though unmistakably a Frenchman, not a Parisian. His dress was not in the prevailing mode: to a practised eye it betrayed the taste and the cut of a provincial tailor. His gait was not that of the Parisian,—less lounging, more stately; and, unlike the Parisian, he seemed indifferent to the gaze of others.

Nevertheless there was about him that air of dignity or distinction which those who are reared from their cradle in the pride of birth acquire so unconsciously that it seems hereditary and inborn. It must also be confessed that the young man himself was endowed with a considerable share of that nobility which Nature capriciously distributes among her favourites with little respect for their pedigree and blazon, the nobility of form and face. He was tall and well shaped, with graceful length of limb and fall of shoulders; his face was handsome, of the purest type of French masculine beauty, —the nose inclined to be aquiline, and delicately thin, with finely-cut open nostrils; the complexion clear,—the eyes large, of a light hazel, with dark lashes, —the hair of a chestnut brown, with no tint of auburn,—the beard and mustache a shade darker, clipped short, not disguising the outline of lips, which were now compressed, as if smiles had of late been unfamiliar to them; yet such compression did not seem in harmony with the physiognomical character of their formation, which was that assigned by Lavater to temperaments easily moved to gayety and pleasure.

Another man, about his own age, coming quickly out of one of the streets of the Chausee d'Antin, brushed close by the stately pedestrian above described, caught sight of his countenance, stopped short, and exclaimed, "Alain!" The person thus abruptly accosted turned his eye tranquilly on the eager face, of which all the lower part was enveloped in black beard; and slightly lifting his hat, with a gesture of the head that implied, "Sir, you are mistaken; I have not the honour to know you," continued his slow indifferent way. The would-be acquaintance was not so easily rebuffed. "Peste," he said, between his teeth, "I am certainly right. He is not much altered: of course I AM; ten years of Paris would improve an orang-outang." Quickening his step, and regaining the side of the man he had called "Alain," he said, with a well-bred mixture of boldness and courtesy in his tone and countenance,

"Ten thousand pardons if I am wrong. Put surely I accost Alain de Kerouec, son of the Marquis de Rochebriant."

"True, sir; but—"

"But you do not remember me, your old college friend, Frederic Lemercier?"

"Is it possibly?" cried Alain, cordially, and with an animation which charged the whole character of his countenance. "My dear Frederic, my dear friend, this is indeed good fortune! So you, too, are at Paris?"

"Of course; and you? Just come, I perceive," he added, somewhat satirically, as, linking his arm in his new-found friend's, he glanced at the cut of that friend's coat-collar.

"I have been herd a fortnight," replied Alain.

"Hem! I suppose you lodge in the old Hotel de Rochebriant. I passed it yesterday, admiring its vast facade, little thinking you were its inmate."

"Neither am I; the hotel does not belong to me; it was sold some years ago by my father."

"Indeed! I hope your father got a good price for it; those grand hotels have trebled their value within the last five years. And how is your father? Still the same polished grand seigneur? I never saw him but once, you know; and I shall never forget his smile, style grand monarque, when he patted me on the head and tipped me ten napoleons."

"My father is no more," said Alain, gravely; "he has been dead nearly three years."

"Ciel! forgive me; I am greatly shocked. Hem! so you are now the Marquis de Rochebriant, a great historical name, worth a large sum in the market. Few such names left. Superb place your old chateau, is it not?"

"A superb place, no—a venerable ruin, yes!"

"Ah, a ruin! so much the better. All the bankers are mad after ruins: so charming an amusement to restore them. You will restore yours, without doubt. I will introduce you to such an architect! has the 'moyen age' at his fingers' ends. Dear,—but a genius."

The young Marquis smiled,—for since he had found a college friend, his face showed that it could smile,—smiled, but not cheerfully, and answered,

"I have no intention to restore Rochebriant. The walls are solid: they have weathered the storms of six centuries, they will last my time, and with me the race perishes."

"Bah! the race perish, indeed! you will marry. 'Parlez moi de ca': you could not come to a better man. I have a list of all the heiresses at Paris, bound in russia leather. You may take your choice out of twenty. Ah, if I were but a Rochebriant! It is an infernal thing to come into the world a Lemercier. I am a democrat, of course. A Lemercier would be in a false position if he were not. But if any one would leave me twenty acres of land, with some antique right to the De and a title, faith, would not I be an aristocrat, and stand up for my order? But now we have met, pray let us dine together. Ah! no doubt you are engaged every day for a month. A Rochebriant just new to Paris must be 'fete' by all the Faubourg."

"No," answered Alain, simply, "I am not engaged; my range of acquaintance is more circumscribed than you suppose."

"So much the better for me. I am luckily disengaged today, which is not often the case, for I am in some request in my own set, though it is not that of the Faubourg. Where shall we dine?—at the Trois Freres?"

"Wherever you please. I know no restaurant at Paris, except a very ignoble one, close by my lodging."

"'Apropos', where do you lodge?" "Rue de l'Universite, Numero ___."

"A fine street, but 'triste'. If you have no longer your family hotel, you have no excuse to linger in that museum of mummies, the Faubourg St. Germain; you must go into one of the new quarters by the Champs Elysees. Leave it to me; I'll find you a charming apartment. I know one to be had a bargain,—a bagatelle,—five hundred naps a-year. Cost you about two or three thousand more to furnish tolerably, not showily. Leave all to me. In three days you shall be settled. Apropos! horses! You must have English ones. How many?—three for the saddle, two for your 'coupe'? I'll find them for you. I will write to London to-morrow: Reese [Rice] is your man."

"Spare yourself that trouble, my dear Frederic. I keep no horses and no coupe. I shall not change my apartment." As he said this, Rochebriant drew himself up somewhat haughtily.

"Faith," thought Lemercier, "is it possible that the Marquis is poor? No. I have always heard that the Rochebriants were among the greatest proprietors in Bretagne. Most likely, with all his innocence

of the Faubourg St. Germain, he knows enough of it to be aware that I, Frederic Lemercier, am not the man to patronize one of its greatest nobles. 'Sacre bleu!' if I thought that; if he meant to give himself airs to me, his old college friend,—I would—I would call him out."

Just as M. Lemercier had come to that bellicose resolution, the Marquis said, with a smile which, though frank, was not without a certain grave melancholy in its expression, "My dear Frederic, pardon me if I seem to receive your friendly offers ungraciously. But I believe that I have. reasons you will approve for leading at Paris a life which you certainly will not envy;" then, evidently desirous to change the subject, he said in a livelier tone, "But what a marvellous city this Paris of ours is! Remember I had never seen it before: it burst on me like a city in the Arabian Nights two weeks ago. And that which strikes me most—I say it with regret and a pang of conscience—is certainly not the Paris of former times, but that Paris which M. Buonaparte—I beg pardon, which the Emperor—has called up around him, and identified forever with his reign. It is what is new in Paris that strikes and enthrals me. Here I see the life of France, and I belong to her tombs!"

"I don't quite understand you," said Lemercier. "If you think that because your father and grandfather were Legitimists, you have not the fair field of living ambition open to you under the Empire, you never were more mistaken. 'Moyen age,' and even rococo, are all the rage. You have no idea how valuable your name would be either at the Imperial Court or in a Commercial Company. But with your fortune you are independent of all but fashion and the Jockey Club.

"And 'apropos' of that, pardon me,—what villain made your coat?—let me know; I will denounce him to the police." Half amused, half amazed, Alain Marquis de Rochebriant looked at Frederic Lemercier much as a good- tempered lion may look upon a lively poodle who takes a liberty with his mane, and after a pause he replied curtly, "The clothes I wear at Paris were made in Bretagne; and if the name of Rochebriant be of any value at all in Paris, which I doubt, let me trust that it will make me acknowledged as 'gentilhomme,' whatever my taste in a coat or whatever the doctrines of a club composed—of jockeys."

"Ha, ha!" cried Lemercier, freeing himself from the arm of his friend, and laughing the more irresistibly as he encountered the grave look of the Marquis. "Pardon me,—I can't help it,—the Jockey Club,—composed of jockeys!—it is too much!—the best joke. My dear, Alain, there is some of the best blood of Europe in the Jockey Club; they would exclude a plain bourgeois like me. But it is all the same: in one respect you are quite right. Walk in a blouse if you please: you are still Rochebriant; you would only be called eccentric. Alas! I am obliged to send to London for my pantaloons: that comes of being a Lemercier. But here we are in the Palais Royal."

CHAPTER II

The salons of the Trois Freres were crowded; our friends found a table with some little difficulty. Lemercier proposed a private cabinet, which, for some reason known to himself, the Marquis declined.

Lemercier spontaneously and unrequested ordered the dinner and the wines.

While waiting for their oysters, with which, when in season, French 'bon- vivants' usually commence their dinner, Lemercier looked round the salon with that air of inimitable, scrutinizing, superb impertinence which distinguishes the Parisian dandy. Some of the ladies returned his glance coquettishly, for Lemercier was 'beau garcon;' others turned aside indignantly, and muttered something to the gentlemen dining with them. The said gentlemen, when old, shook their heads, and continued to eat unmoved; when young, turned briskly round, and looked at first fiercely at M. Lemercier, but, encountering his eye through the glass which he had screwed into his socket, noticing the hardihood of his countenance and the squareness of his shoulders, even they turned back to the tables, shook their heads, and continued to eat unmoved, just like the old ones.

"Ah!" cried Lemercier, suddenly, "here comes a man you should know, 'mon cher.' He will tell you how to place your money,—a rising man, a coming man, a future minister. Ah! 'bon jour,' Duplessis, 'bon jour,'" kissing his hand to a gentleman who had just entered and was looking about him for a seat. He was evidently well and favourably known at the Trois Freres. The waiters had flocked round him, and were pointing to a table by the window, which a saturnine Englishman, who had dined off a beefsteak and potatoes, was about to vacate.

M. Duplessis, having first assured himself, like a prudent man, that his table was secure, having ordered his oysters, his chablis, and his 'potage a la bisque,' now paced calmly and slowly across the salon, and halted before Lemercier.

Here let me pause for a moment, and give the reader a rapid sketch of the two Parisians.

Frederic Lemercier is dressed, somewhat too showily, in the extreme of the prevalent fashion. He wears a superb pin in his cravat,—a pin worth two thousand francs; he wears rings on his fingers, 'breloques' to his watch-chain. He has a warm though dark complexion, thick black eyebrows, full lips, a nose somewhat turned up, but not small, very fine large dark eyes, a bold, open, somewhat impertinent expression of countenance; withal decidedly handsome, thanks to colouring, youth, and vivacity of regard.

Lucien Duplessis, bending over the table, glancing first with curiosity at the Marquis de Rochebriant, who leans his cheek on his hand and seems not to notice him, then concentrating his attention on Frederic Lemercier, who sits square with his hands clasped,—Lucien Duplessis is somewhere between forty and fifty, rather below the middle height, slender, but not slight,—what in English phrase is called "wiry." He is dressed with extreme simplicity: black frockcoat buttoned up; black cravat worn higher than men who follow the fashions wear their neckcloths nowadays; a hawk's eye and a hawk's beak; hair of a dull brown, very short, and wholly without curl; his cheeks thin and smoothly shaven, but he wears a mustache and imperial, plagiarized from those of his sovereign, and, like all plagiarisms, carrying the borrowed beauty to extremes, so that the points of mustache and imperial, stiffened and sharpened by cosmetics which must have been composed of iron, looked like three long stings guarding lip and jaw from invasion; a pale olive-brown complexion, eyes small, deep-sunk, calm, piercing; his expression of face at first glance not striking, except for quiet immovability. Observed more heedfully, the expression was keenly intellectual,—determined about the lips, calculating about the brows: altogether the face of no ordinary man, and one not, perhaps, without fine and high qualities, concealed from the general gaze by habitual reserve, but justifying the confidence of those whom he admitted into his intimacy.

"Ah, mon cher," said Lemercier, "you promised to call on me yesterday at two o'clock. I waited in for you half an hour; you never came."

"No; I went first to the Bourse. The shares in that Company we spoke of have fallen; they will fall much lower: foolish to buy in yet; so the object of my calling on you was over. I took it for granted you would not wait if I failed my appointment. Do you go to the opera to-night?"

"I think not; nothing worth going for: besides, I have found an old friend, to whom I consecrate this evening. Let me introduce you to the Marquis de Rochebriant. Alain, M. Duplessis."

The two gentlemen bowed.

"I had the honour to be known to Monsieur your father," said Duplessis.

"Indeed," returned Rochebriant. "He had not visited Paris for many years before he died."

"It was in London I met him, at the house of the Russian Princess C____."

The Marquis coloured high, inclined his head gravely, and made no reply. Here the waiter brought the oysters and the chablis, and Duplessis retired to his own table.

"That is the most extraordinary man," said Frederic, as he squeezed the lemon over his oysters, "and very much to be admired."

"How so? I see nothing at least to admire in his face," said the Marquis, with the bluntness of a provincial.

"His face. Ah! you are a Legitimist,—party prejudice. He dresses his face after the Emperor; in itself a very clever face, surely."

"Perhaps, but not an amiable one. He looks like a bird of prey."

"All clever men are birds of prey. The eagles are the heroes, and the owls the sages. Duplessis is not an eagle nor an owl. I should rather call him a falcon, except that I would not attempt to hoodwink him."

"Call him what you will," said the Marquis, indifferently; "M. Duplessis can be nothing to me."

"I am not so sure of that," answered Frederic, somewhat nettled by the phlegm with which the Provincial regarded the pretensions of the Parisian. "Duplessis, I repeat it, is an extraordinary man. Though untitled, he descends from your old aristocracy; in fact, I believe, as his name shows, from the same stem as the Richelieus. His father was a great scholar, and I believe be has read much himself. Might have distinguished himself in literature or at the bar, but his parents died fearfully poor; and some distant relations in commerce took charge of him, and devoted his talents to the 'Bourse.' Seven years ago he lived in a single chamber, 'au quatrieme,' near the Luxembourg. He has now a hotel, not large but charming, in the Champs Elysees, worth at least six hundred thousand francs. Nor has he made his own fortune alone, but that of many others; some of birth as high as your own. He has the genius of riches, and knocks off a million as a poet does an ode, by the force of inspiration. He is hand-in-glove with the Ministers, and has been invited to Compiegne by the Emperor. You will find him very useful."

Alain made a slight movement of incredulous dissent, and changed the conversation to reminiscences of old school-boy days.

The dinner at length came to a close. Frederic rang for the bill,— glanced over it. "Fifty-nine francs," said he, carelessly flinging down his napoleon and a half. The Marquis silently drew forth his purse and extracted the same sum. When they were out of the restaurant, Frederic proposed adjourning to his own rooms. "I can promise you an excellent cigar, one of a box given to me by an invaluable young Spaniard attached to the Embassy here. Such cigars are not to be had at Paris for money, nor even for love; seeing that women, however devoted and generous, never offer you anything better than a cigarette. Such cigars are only to be had for friendship. Friendship is a jewel."

"I never smoke," answered the Marquis, "but I shall be charmed to come to your rooms; only don't let me encroach on your good-nature. Doubtless you have engagements for the evening."

"None till eleven o'clock, when I have promised to go to a soiree to which I do not offer to take you; for it is one of those Bohemian entertainments at which it would do you harm in the Faubourg to

assist, —at least until you have made good your position. Let me see, is not the Duchesse de Tarascon a relation of yours?"

"Yes; my poor mother's first cousin."

"I congratulate you. 'Tres grande dame.' She will launch you in 'puro coelo,' as Juno might have launched one of her young peacocks."

"There has been no acquaintance between our houses," returned the Marquis, dryly, "since the mesalliance of her second nuptials."

"Mesalliance! second nuptials! Her second husband was the Duc de Tarascon."

"A duke of the First Empire, the grandson of a butcher."

"Diable! you are a severe genealogist, Monsieur le Marquis. How can you consent to walk arm-in-arm with me, whose great-grandfather supplied bread to the same army to which the Due de Tarascon's grandfather furnished the meat?"

"My dear Frederic, we two have an equal pedigree, for our friendship dates from the same hour. I do not blame the Duchesse de Tarascon for marrying the grandson of a butcher, but for marrying the son of a man made duke by a usurper. She abandoned the faith of her house and the cause of her sovereign. Therefore her marriage is a blot on our scutcheon."

Frederic raised his eyebrows, but had the tact to pursue the subject no further. He who interferes in the quarrels of relations must pass through life without a friend.

The young men now arrived at Lemercier's apartment, an entresol looking on the Boulevard des Italiens, consisting of more rooms than a bachelor generally requires; low-pitched, indeed, but of good dimensions, and decorated and furnished with a luxury which really astonished the provincial, though, with the high-bred pride of an oriental, he suppressed every sign of surprise.

Florentine cabinets, freshly retouched by the exquisite skill of Mombro; costly specimens of old Sevres and Limoges; pictures and bronzes and marble statuettes,—all well chosen and of great price, reflected from mirrors in Venetian frames,—made a 'coup d'oeil' very favourable to that respect which the human mind pays to the evidences of money. Nor was comfort less studied than splendour. Thick carpets covered the floors, doubled and quilted portieres excluded all draughts from chinks in the doors. Having allowed his friend a few minutes to contemplate and admire the 'salle a manger' and 'salon' which constituted his more state apartments, Frederic then conducted him into a small cabinet, fitted up with scarlet cloth and gold fringes, whereon were artistically arranged trophies of Eastern weapons and Turkish pipes with amber mouthpieces.

There, placing the Marquis at ease on a divan and flinging himself on another, the Parisian exquisite ordered a valet, well dressed as himself, to bring coffee and liqueurs; and after vainly pressing one of his matchless cigars on his friend, indulged in his own Regalia.

"They are ten years old," said Frederic, with a tone of compassion at Alain's self-inflicted loss, —"ten years old. Born therefore about the year in which we two parted—"

"When you were so hastily summoned from college," said the Marquis, "by the news of your father's illness. We expected you back in vain. Have you been at Paris ever since?"

"Ever since; my poor father died of that illness. His fortune proved much larger than was suspected: my share amounted to an income from investments in stocks, houses, etc., to upwards of sixty thousand francs a-year; and as I wanted six years to my majority of course the capital on attaining my majority would be increased by accumulation. My mother desired to keep me near her; my uncle, who was joint guardian with her, looked with disdain on our poor little provincial cottage; so promising an heir should acquire his finishing education under masters at Paris. Long before I was of age, I was initiated into politer mysteries of our capital than those celebrated by Eugene Sue. When I took possession of my fortune five years ago, I was considered a Croesus; and really for that patriarchal time I was wealthy. Now, alas! my accumulations have vanished in my outfit; and sixty thousand francs a-year is the least a Parisian can live upon. It is not only that all prices have fabulously increased, but that the dearer things become, the better people live. When I first came out,

the world speculated upon me; now, in order to keep my standing, I am forced to speculate on the world. Hitherto I have not lost; Duplessis let me into a few good things this year, worth one hundred thousand francs or so. Croesus consulted the Delphic Oracle. Duplessis was not alive in the time of Croesus, or Croesus would have consulted Duplessis."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.