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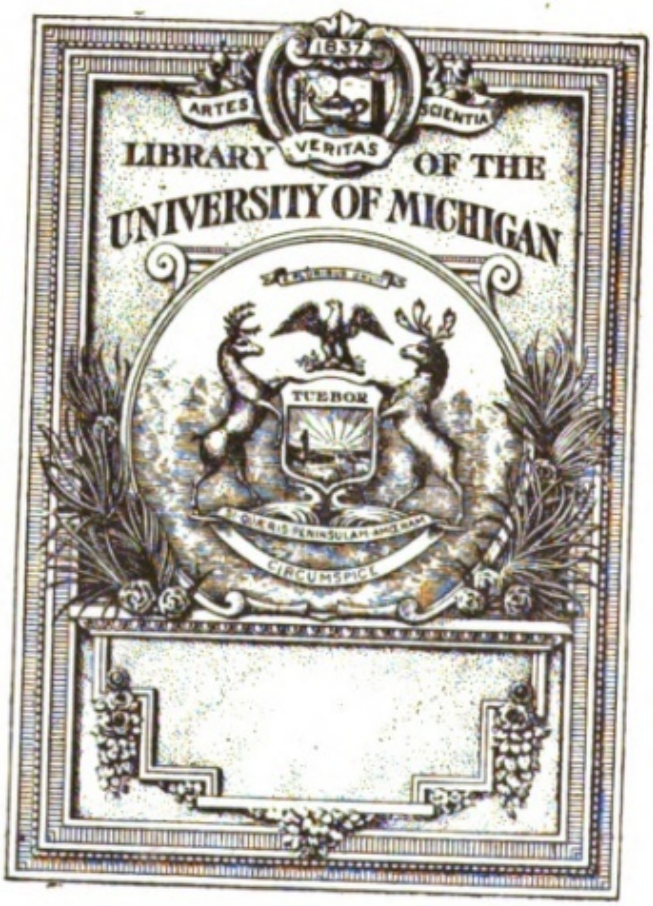

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THE WIDOW LEROUGE

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"Hush!" murmured Noel. "They must not take me alive."

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THE WIDOW LEROUGE

Translated from the French of

EMILE GABORIAU

Illustrated by

LOUISE L. HEUSTIS

Charles Scribner's Sons

New York 1906

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THE WIDOW LEROUGE

CHAPTER I.

On Thursday, the 6th of March, 1862, two days after Shrove Tuesday, five women of the village of Jonchère presented themselves at the bureau of police at Bougival.

They stated that for two days past no one had seen the Widow Lerouge,—one of their neighbors, who lived by herself in an isolated cottage. The house was shut up. Several persons had knocked without receiving an answer. The window-shutters as well as the door were closed; and it was impossible to obtain even a glimpse of the interior.

This state of affairs alarmed them. Apprehensive of a crime, or at the least an accident, they demanded the interference of justice to satisfy their doubts by forcing the door and entering the house.

Bougival is a quiet maritime village, its inhabitants principally boatmen, who ply upon the river. Trifling offences are sometimes heard of in its neighborhood, but crimes are rare.

The commissary of police at first refused to listen to the women, but their importunities fatigued him into compliance. He called into requisition the services of a

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locksmith, the brigadier of gendarmes, and two of his men; and, thus accompanied, he followed the neighbor of the Widow Lerouge.

Whatever celebrity it possesses, La Jonchère owes to the projectors of the railway, which has now passed close to it for several years, with more enterprise than profit. It is a hamlet of small importance, seated upon the side of the hill which overlooks the Seine between Malmaison and Bougival. It is about twenty minutes' walk from the main road; which, passing by Rueil and Port Marly, goes from Paris to St. Germain. A steep and rugged road, or rather by-path, not easily travelled, turning off at right angles from the main road, leads to it.

The little troup, headed by the gendarmes, followed the highway bordering the river, until it reached this cross-road, into which it turned, and after stumbling over its rugged inequalities for about a hundred yards halted before the dwelling of the Widow Lerouge.

It was a house, or rather cottage, of modest, but comfortable appearance, and must have been built by some Parisian shopkeeper in love with the beauties of Nature; for all the trees had been carefully cut down. More deep than wide, it consisted of two apartments on the ground floor with a loft above. Around it extended a much-neglected garden, enclosed by a wall of dry stones about three feet high, much dilapidated,—broken and crumbling in many places, and affording but slight protection against trespassers. To this garden a light wooden gate, turning on hinges clumsily constructed of iron wire, gave access.

"This is the house," said the women.

The commissary turned. During his short walk, the number of his followers had been rapidly increasing,

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and now included all the idle persons in the village. He saw before him about forty peasants of both sexes, nearly wild with curiosity.

"Let no one enter the garden," said he; and, to ensure obedience, he placed the two gendarmes on sentry before the entrance, and advanced towards the house, accompanied by the brigadier and the locksmith.

After calling several times, he knocked loudly with his cane, at the door first, and then successively at each of the window-shutters. After each blow, he placed his ear against the wood and listened. Hearing nothing, he turned to the locksmith.

"Open!" said he.

The workman unstrapped his basket, and produced his implements. He had already introduced a skeleton key into the lock, when a loud exclamation was heard from the crowd outside the gate.

"The key!" they cried. "Here is the key!"

An urchin of some dozen years, playing with his companions, had perceived in a ditch by the roadside an enormous key, which he had picked up and carried to the cottage in triumph.

"Give it to me gamin," said the brigadier. "We shall see."

The key was tried. It was, in fact, the key of the house.

The commissary and the locksmith exchanged glances full of sinister misgivings. "This looks bad," muttered the brigadier. They entered the house; while the crowd, restrained with difficulty by the gendarmes, stamped with impatience, or clambered on the garden wall, stretching their necks eagerly, to see or hear something of what was passing within the cottage.

Those who anticipated the discovery of crime, were

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unhappily not deceived. Of this the commissary was satisfied upon the threshold. Every thing in the first room pointed with a sad eloquence to the presence of a malefactor. The furniture—a bureau and two large trunks—were forced and broken open. In the inner room, the disorder was even greater. It seemed as though some furious hand had taken a fiendish pleasure in creating frightful disorder.

In the inner room, near the chimney, was found extended upon the hearth the dead body of the Widow Lerouge. She was lying with her face in the ashes. One side of the face and a portion of the hair were burnt; it appeared a miracle that the fire had not caught her clothing.

"Wretches!" exclaimed the brigadier. "Could they not have robbed, without assassinating the poor woman?"

"But where has she been wounded?" inquired the commissary. "I do not see any blood."

"Hold! here between the shoulders," replied the brigadier; "two fierce blows, by my faith. I'll wager my stripes she had no time to cry out."

He stooped over the corpse and touched it.

"She is cold," he continued, "and completely rigid. It is at least thirty-six hours since she received her death-wound."

The commissary began writing at the table his summary official report.

"We are not here to speculate, but to discover the criminal," said he. "Let information be at once conveyed to the justice of peace, and the mayor at Bougival, and send this letter without delay to the Palace de Justice in Paris. In less than two hours a judge of inquiry

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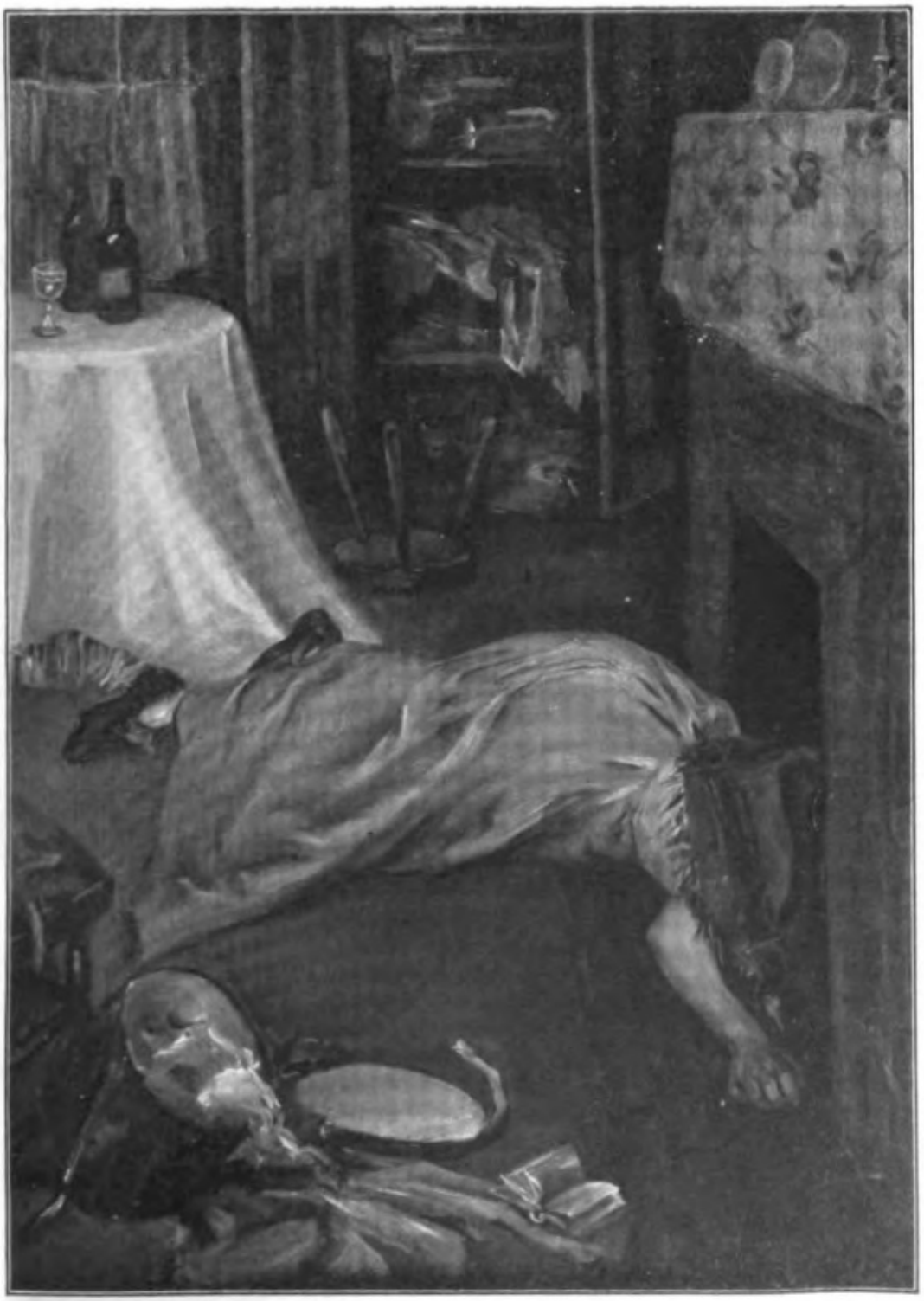

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can be here. In the meanwhile I will proceed to a provisional inquest."

"Shall I carry the letter?" asked the brigadier.

"No, send one of your men; you will be useful to me here in keeping away intruders, and finding the witnesses I shall require. It is advisable to leave every thing in this chamber as we have found it. I shall install myself in the other."

A gendarme departed at a run towards the station at Rueil; and the commissary commenced his investigations in regular form, as prescribed by law.

"Who was this Widow Lerouge? Where did she come from? How was she employed? Upon what means did she live? What were her habits, her manners, her companionships? Was she known to have enemies? Was she a miser? Did she pass for being rich?"

All this it was important to the commissary to ascertain.

But, although the witnesses were numerous enough, they possessed but little information. The depositions of the neighbors, successively interrogated, were empty, incoherent, and incomplete. No one knew any thing of the victim. She was a stranger in the country. Many presented themselves as witnesses, moreover, who came forward less to afford information than to seek the gratification of their curiosity. A gardener who had been an acquaintance of the deceased, and a young girl who supplied her with milk, were the only persons capable of giving any precise evidence; and that was insignificant enough.

In a word, after three hours of laborious investigation, after having undergone the infliction of all the gossip of the country, after receiving evidence the most

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contradictory, and listened to commentaries the most ridiculous the following is all that appeared any way near certainty to the bewildered commissary.

Twelve years before, at the beginning of 1850, the woman Lerouge had made her appearance at Bougival, with a large wagon piled with furniture, linen, and her personal effects. She had stopped at an inn, declared her intention of settling in the neighborhood, and immediately went in quest of a house. Finding this one unoccupied, and liking it, she had taken it, without trying to beat down the terms; paid in advance three hundred and twenty francs for the first six months, but refused to sign a lease.

The house taken, she installed herself the same day, and expended about a hundred francs on repairs.

She was a woman about fifty-four or fifty-five years of age, well preserved, active, and in the enjoyment of excellent health. No one knew her reasons for taking up her abode in a country where she was an absolute stranger. She was supposed to have come from Normandy, having been at times seen to wear the high white muslin head-dress of that country. This night bonnet, as the neighbors called it, did not prevent her from wearing very coquettish costumes during the day; indeed, she wore ordinarily very handsome dresses, very showy ribbons on her bonnets, and covered herself with as many jewels as a gipsy. Without doubt she had lived near the sea, for sailors and seafaring topics recurred incessantly in her conversation.

Her husband she said was dead, having been lost at sea; but, as she never entered into particulars on this subject, the impression was that she disliked speaking of him.

On one particular occasion she had remarked in

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presence of the milkmaid and three other persons, "No woman was ever more miserable than I during my married life." And at another, "All new, all fine! A new broom sweeps clean. My sea-monster of a husband loved me for only a year!"

The Widow Lerouge passed for rich, or at the least for being very well off; and she was not a miser. She had given a woman at Malmaison sixty francs to pay her rent, and at another time advanced two hundred francs to a fisherman of Port Marly. She was fond of good living, spent a good deal of money on her table, and bought wine in large quantities. She took pleasure in treating her acquaintances, and her dinners were excellent. If complimented on her easy circumstances, she made no very strong denial. She had frequently been heard to say, "I have neither lands nor houses: but I have every thing I want; and, if I wished for any thing more, I could have it."

Beyond this, the slightest allusion to her past life, her country, or her family had never escaped her, although she was talkative, and at times very boastful. She was supposed, however, to have seen the world, and to know a great deal. She never went out in the evenings, but barricaded herself in her cottage as in a fortress. It was well known that she got tipsy regularly after dinner and went to bed very soon afterwards. Rarely had strangers been seen to visit her,—two or three times a lady and a young man, and upon one occasion two gentlemen,—one old and decorated, the other young and of a distinguished appearance; these latter came in a magnificent carriage.

In conclusion, the deceased was held in little esteem by her neighbors. Her conversation was often singular, and odious in the mouth of a woman of her age. She

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had been heard to give a young girl the most detestable counsels. A pork butcher, embarrassed in his business, tempted by her supposed wealth, had at one time paid her his addresses. She declined his advances, declaring that to be married once was enough for her. At several times two men had been seen in her house, the first of whom was young and looked like a laborer who worked upon the railway; the other was a big man, rather elderly, with huge brown whiskers and dressed in a blouse, who appeared very fierce and even dangerous. These men were suspected to be her lovers.

Having interrogated all his witnesses, the commissary proceeded to write out their depositions. As he finished the last page, the judge of inquiry arrived upon the scene, attended by the chief of the detective police, and one of his agents.

— M. Daburon was a man thirty-eight years of age, well made, and of very prepossessing appearance; sympathetic notwithstanding his coldness; wearing upon his handsome countenance a calm and sweet expression, although tinged with sadness. This settled melancholy had remained with him ever since his recovery, two years before, from a dreadful malady, which had well nigh proved fatal.

Judge of inquiry since 1859, he had rapidly acquired the most brilliant reputation. Laborious, patient, and acute, he knew with singular skill how to disentangle the skein of the most complicated affair, and from the midst of a thousand threads lay hold of the right one. None better than he could solve those terrible problems where the sign x—in algebra, the unknown quantity—represents the criminal. Armed with an irresistible logic, he deduced the unknown from the known, and excelled in collecting and uniting in a bundle of over-

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whelming proof facts to others unimportant and circumstances in appearance the most insignificant.

Although possessed of qualifications for his office so numerous and valuable, he was tremblingly distrustful of his own abilities, and exercised his terrible functions with diffidence and hesitation. He wanted audacity to risk those *coups de theatre*, so often resorted to by his contemporaries in the pursuit of truth.

Thus it was repugnant to his feelings to deceive even an accused person, or lay snares for him; in fact the mere idea of the possibility of a judicial error terrified him. They said of him in the courts, "He is a trembler." What he sought was not presumption or conviction, but the most absolute certainty. No rest for him until the day when the accused was forced to bow before the evidence; so much so that he had been jestingly reproached with seeking not to discover criminals but innocents.

The chief of detective police was none other than the celebrated Gevrol, who has so often figured in our previous works. He was really an able man, but wanting in perseverance, and liable to be blinded by an incredible obstinacy. If he lost a clew, he could not bring himself to acknowledge it, still less to retrace his steps. His audacity and coolness, however, rendered it difficult to disconcert him; and being at once courageous, and possessed of immense personal strength, he never hesitated to confront the most daring of malefactors.

But his specialty, his triumph, his glory, was his memory of faces, so prodigious as to exceed belief. Did he see a face for five minutes, it was enough. Its possessor was catalogued, and, no matter how long the interval, recognized on reappearance. The impossibilities of place, the unlikelihood of circumstances, the most in-

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credible disguises, could not lead him astray. What he remembered, he said, was the peculiarities of the shape, size, color, and expression of the eyes, at which alone he looked, without noticing any other features.

This faculty was severely tested before he had been a week at Poissy, by the following experiment. Three prisoners were draped in coverings completely disguising their figures. Over their faces were veils, allowing nothing of the features to be seen except the eyes; and in this state they were shown to Gevrol.

Without the slightest hesitation he recognized the prisoners and named them.

Had chance alone assisted him?

The aid-de-camp who attended Gevrol was an old offender, reconciled to the law,—a jolly fellow, cunning, quick, and useful in his way, but secretly jealous of his chief, whose abilities he held in light estimation. He was named Lecoq.

The commissary, by this time heartily tired of his responsibilities, welcomed the judge of inquiry and his agents as liberators. He related rapidly the facts collected in his official report.

"You have proceeded well, monsieur," said the judge. "All is stated clearly; yet there is one fact you have omitted to ascertain."

"What is that, monsieur?" inquired the commissary.

"On what day was the Widow Lerouge last seen, and at what hour?"

"I am coming to that, monsieur. She was seen and spoken to on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, at twenty minutes after five. She was then returning from Bougival with a pannier of provisions."

"You are sure of the hour?" inquired Gevrol.

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"Perfectly, and for this reason: two witnesses, the woman Tellier and a cooper who lives hard by, alighted from the omnibus which leaves Marly every hour, when they perceived the widow in the cross-road, and hastened to overtake her. They conversed with her until they separated at the door of her own house."

"And what had she in her pannier?" demanded the judge of inquiry.

The witnesses were ignorant. They knew only that she carried two bottles of wine sealed, and another of brandy. She complained to them of headache, and said, "While you are going to enjoy yourselves, according to custom on Shrove Tuesday, I am going to bed."

"So, so!" exclaimed the chief of police. "I know where it is necessary to search!"

"You think so?" inquired M. Daburon.

"Parbleu! it is clear enough. We want to find the large brown man, the gallant in the blouse. The brandy and the wine were intended for his entertainment. The widow expected him to supper. He came, sure enough, the amiable gallant!"

"Oh!" cried the brigadier, evidently scandalized, "she was very old, and terribly ugly!"

Gevrol regarded the honest gendarme with an expression of contemptuous pity.

"Know, brigadier," said he, "that a woman who has money is always young and pretty, if she desires to be thought so!"

"Perhaps there is something in that," replied the judge. "It did not occur to me. I am more impressed by the remark of this unfortunate woman, 'If I wished for any thing more, I could have it.'"

"That also attracted my attention," acquiesced the commissary.

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Gevrol did not take the trouble to listen. He held to his own opinion, and began to inspect minutely every nook and corner of the room. Suddenly he turned towards the commissary.

"Now that I think of it," cried he, "was it not on Tuesday that the weather changed? It had been dry for a fortnight, and on that evening it rained. At what hour did the rain commence here?"

"At half-past nine," answered the brigadier. "I went out from supper to make my circuit of the dancing halls, when I was overtaken by a heavy shower opposite to the Rue Pecheurs. In less than ten minutes there was half an inch of water on the pavement."

"Very well," said Gevrol. "Then if the man came after half-past nine his shoes must have been muddy. If dry, he arrived sooner. This ought to have been ascertained before the floor was disturbed. Were there any imprints of footsteps, M. le commissary?"

"I must confess we never thought of looking for them."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief of police, in a tone of irritation, "that is vexatious!"

"Wait," replied the commissary, "there is yet time to see if there are any,—not in this room, but in the other. We have there deranged absolutely nothing. My footsteps and those of the brigadier may be easily distinguished. Let us see."

As the commissary opened the door of the second chamber, Gevrol stopped him.

"I demand permission, M. the judge," said he, "to examine the apartment before any one else is permitted to enter."

"Certainly," acquiesced Daburon.

Gevrol passed into the room, the others remaining

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on the threshold. He took in at a glance the scene of the crime.

Every thing, as the commissary had stated, seemed to have been overturned by some furious madman.

In the middle of the chamber stood a table laid for one person, and covered with a fine linen table cloth, white as snow. Upon this was placed a magnificent wine-glass of the rarest manufacture, a very handsome knife, and a plate of the finest porcelain. There was an opened bottle of wine, half [redacted] touched, and another of brandy, from which about five or six *petits verres* had been taken.

At the right, along the wall, stood two handsome cupboards of walnut, with ornamental locks and hinges of brass, one each side of the window; both were empty, and the contents scattered on all sides. There were clothing, linen, and other effects unfolded, tossed about, or smashed to pieces.

At the back, near the chimney, a small closet in the wall for holding the plate was torn open. At the other side of the chimney, an old secretary with a marble top had been smashed into fragments, and rummaged to its inmost recesses. The desk, wrenched away, hung by a single hinge. The drawers were pulled out and emptied upon the floor.

At the left of the room the bed had been completely disarranged and overturned, the bed-ticking cut, and the straw with which it was filled thrown out.

"Not the slightest imprint," murmured Gevrol, disappointed. "He must have arrived before half-past nine. You can all come in now."

He walked right to the corpse of the widow, near which he knelt.

"It cannot be said," grumbled he, "that the work

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is not properly done! the assassin was no apprentice!"

Then looking right and left,—

"Oh! oh!" continued he, "the poor devil was busy with her cooking when he struck her; see her pan of ham and eggs upon the hearth. The brute hadn't patience to wait for his dinner. He struck the blow fasting; therefore he can't invoke the gaiety of dessert in his defence!"

"It is evident," said the commissary, "that robbery was the motive of this crime."

"It is probable," answered Gevrol in a sharp tone; "and that accounts for the absence of silver on the table."

"Hold! Some pieces of gold in this drawer!" exclaimed Lecoq, who had been searching on his own account,—"about three hundred and twenty francs!"

"What!" cried Gevrol, a little disconcerted.

But he recovered from his embarrassment quickly, and continued,—

"He must have forgotten them; that often happens. I have more than once known an assassin, having accomplished the murder, so utterly bewildered as to depart without remembering the plunder, for which he had committed the crime. Our man became excited perhaps, or perhaps may have been interrupted. Some one may have knocked at the door. What makes me more willing to think so is, that the scamp did not leave the candle burning. You see he took the trouble to extinguish it."

"Bast!" said Lecoq. "That proves nothing. He is probably an economical and careful man."

The investigations of the two agents were continued all through the house; but their most minute researches

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resulted in discovering absolutely nothing; not one piece of evidence to convict; not the most feeble indication which might serve as a point of departure. Even the dead woman's papers, if she possessed any, had disappeared. Not a letter, not a scrap of paper even, to be met with.

From time to time Gevrol stopped to swear or grumble.

"Oh! it is a clever piece of work! See what care the scoundrel takes of number one! He is a clever hand!"

"What conclusion do you come to, monsieur?" at length demanded the judge of inquiry.

"It is a drawn game, M. the judge," replied Gevrol. "We are baffled for the present. The miscreant has taken his measures with great precaution; but, before night, I shall have a dozen men in pursuit. He shall not escape us long. He has carried off some table silver and some jewels. He is lost!"

"With all that," remarked M. Daburon, "we are no further advanced than we were this morning."

"Sapristi!" growled Gevrol. "A man can do only what he can!"

"Confound it!" said Lecoq in a low tone, perfectly audible, however, "why is not Père Tirauclair here?"

"What could he do more than we have done?" retorted Gevrol, directing a furious glance at his subordinate.

Lecoq stooped his head and was silent, inwardly delighted at having wounded his chief.

"Who and what is this Père Tirauclair?" demanded the judge. "It seems to me that I have heard the name, but can't think where."

"He is an extraordinary man!" exclaimed Lecoq.

"He was formerly a pawnbroker's clerk," added

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Gevrol; "but he is now a rich old fellow. His real name is Tabaret; and he has taken to the business of police, as others do to painting or music, for amusement."

"And to augment his revenues?" asked the commissary.

"He?" replied Lecoq. "No danger of that. He works so much for the glory of success that he often spends money from his own pocket. It is great amusement for him though! In the service we have nicknamed him 'Tirauclair,' because of a phrase he is in the habit of repeating. Ah! he is smart, the old weasel! It was he who in the case of the banker's wife, you remember, discovered the truth, that the lady was herself the robber."

"True!" retorted Gevrol; "and it was he who had poor Derème beheaded for killing his wife; and all the while the poor man was innocent."

"We lose our time, monsieurs," interrupted the judge of inquiry. And, addressing himself to Lecoq, he said,—

"Go and find Père Tabaret. I have a great desire to speak to him, and shall be glad to see him at work here."

Lecoq started at a run. Gevrol was seriously humiliated.

"You have the right to demand the services of whom you please," said he in a tone of suppressed passion; "but I might—"

"Do not annoy yourself, M. Gevrol. I have great confidence in your ability. But to-day we happen to differ in opinion. You hold absolutely to your brown man in the blouse, and I am convinced he is not the criminal at all!"

"I believe that I am right," replied the chief, "and

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I hope to prove it; but I shall find the scoundrel, be he whom he may!"

"I ask nothing better," said M. Daburon.

"Only if you will permit me to give—what shall I say without failing in respect?—a piece of advice?"

"Speak!"

"I would advise you to distrust Père Tabaret."

"Truly? And for what reason?"

"The old fellow is too passionate; he owes his success in the police to nothing more or less than his invention. And, as he is vainer than a peacock, he is apt to overdo matters in order to make a sensation. When in the presence of a crime like this of to-day, for example, he pretends to be able to explain every thing on the instant. And he will in fact invent a history that will be *en rapport* exactly with the situation. He will pretend, unassisted, to reconstruct all the scenes of an assassination, as a savant who from a single bone reconstructs an antediluvian animal. Sometimes, as in the case of the banker's wife, he divines correctly; but at other times he is far out of the way, as in the case of the tailor, the unfortunate Derème."

"I thank you for your advice," said M. Daburon, "and will endeavor to profit by it. Now, M. le commissary," continued he, "it is most important to ascertain, if possible, from what part of the country came the Widow Lerouge."

The procession of witnesses marshalled by the brigadier commenced to pass before the judge of inquiry.

But nothing new was elicited. It was evident that the Widow Lerouge had been during her lifetime a singularly discreet woman; for, although talkative, nothing in any way connected with her antecedents remained in the memory of the gossips of Jonchère.

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All the people interrogated tried obstinately to impart to the judge their own convictions and personal conjectures. Public opinion sided with Gevrol. With one voice, the assembly denounced the big brown man of the grey blouse. He must surely be the culprit. Every one remembered his ferocious aspect, and how, struck by his suspicious appearance, they had wisely avoided him. He had one evening menaced a woman, and another day beaten a child. They could point out neither the child nor the woman; but no matter: these brutal acts were notoriously public.

M. Daburon began to despair of gaining the least enlightenment, when some one brought a grocer of Bougival, at whose shop the victim used to purchase her provisions, and a child thirteen years old, who knew, it was said, something positive.

The grocer first made her appearance.

She had heard the Widow Lerouge speak of having a son yet living.

"Are you quite sure of this?" demanded the judge.

"As of my existence," answered the grocer. "One evening,—yes, it was evening,—she was, saving your presence, a little tipsy,—she remained in my store more than an hour."

"And she said,—"

"I think I see her now," continued the grocer; "she was leaning against the counter near the scales. She was jesting with a fisherman of Marly, Father Husson, who can tell you the same; and she called him a fresh water sailor. 'My husband,' said she, 'would sometimes remain a couple of years on a voyage, and used to bring me back cocoanuts. I have a boy who is also a sailor, like his dead father,—a sailor in the navy.'"

"Did she mention her son's name?"

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"Not that evening; but another evening, when she was, if I must say it, drunk, she told us that her son was called Jacques, and she had not seen him for a very long time."

"Did she speak ill of her husband?"

"Never! she only said he was jealous and brutal, and used to beat her unmercifully; but he was a good man at bottom, and made her life miserable. He had a weak head, and forged ideas out of nothing. In fact, he was a very stupid brute, but a very good, kind man."

"Did her son ever come to see her while she lived here?"

"She never told me of it."

"Did she spend much money with you?"

"As it might happen. About sixty francs a month; sometimes more, when she bought some old brandy. She was good pay, poor woman!"

The grocer, knowing no more, was dismissed.

The child, who was now brought forward, belonged to parents in easy circumstances. Tall and strong for his age, he had bright intelligent eyes, and features expressive of watchfulness and cunning. The presence of the judge did not intimidate him.

"Let us hear, my boy," said the judge, "what you know."

"Monsieur, a few days ago,—Sunday last,—I saw a man at Madame Lerouge's garden-gate."

"At what time of the day?"

"In the morning. I was going to church, to serve the second mass."

"Well," continued the judge, "and this was a big brown man, dressed in a blouse?"

"No, monsieur: he was short, very fat, and old."

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"You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"Certain, monsieur," replied the urchin, "I saw him close, face to face; I spoke to him."

"Tell me, then, what occurred?"

"Well, monsieur, I was passing, when I saw this fat man at the gate. He appeared very much vexed,—oh! vexed awfully! His face was red, or rather purple, as far as the middle of his head, which I could see very well; for it was bare, and had very little hair on it."

"And did he speak to you first?"

"Yes, monsieur, he saw me, and called out, 'Halloa! little fellow!' I went up to him; and he asked me if I had got a good pair of legs? I answered, yes. Then he took me by the ear, but without hurting me, and said, 'Since that is so, if you will run an errand for me, I will give you ten sous. Run as far as the Seine; and, when you reach the quay, you will see a large sloop moored. Go on board, and ask to see the captain, Gervaise: he will be there. Tell him that he can slip his cable,—that I am ready.' Then he put ten sous in my hand; and I went."

"If all the witnesses were like this bright little fellow," murmured the commissary, "what a pleasure it would be!"

"Now," said the judge, "tell us how you executed your commission?"

"I went to the sloop, monsieur, and found the man, and I told him; and that's all."

Gevrol, who had listened with the most lively attention, leaned over towards the ear of M. Daburon.

"M. le judge," said he in a low voice, "will you permit me to ask the boy a few questions?"

"Certainly, M. Gevrol."

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"Tell us, my little friend," asked Gevrol, "if you saw this man again, would you know him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then there was something remarkable about him?"

"Yes, I should think so! his face was like a brick-bat!"

"And is that all?"

"Well, yes, monsieur."

"Can you remember how he was dressed? had he a blouse?"

"No: it was a vest. Under the arms it had large pockets; and from one of them peeped out the half of a blue spotted pocket handkerchief."

"How were his pantaloons?"

"I do not remember them."

"And his under vest?"

"Let me see," answered the child. "I don't think he wore an undervest. And yet,—but no, I remember he did not wear one: he had a long cravat, fastened near his neck by a large ring."

"Ah!" said Gevrol with an air of satisfaction, "you are a bright boy; and I wager that, if you try hard to remember, you can find more particulars than those you have given us."

The boy dropped his head, and remained silent. From the knitting of his young brows, it was plain he was making a violent effort of memory. "Yes," cried he suddenly, "I remember another thing."

"What?"

"The man wore very large rings in his ears."

"Bravo!" cried Gevrol, "here is an identification complete. I shall find this gentleman with the ear-rings again. M. the judge may prepare a warrant for his arrest."

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"I believe, indeed, the testimony of this child is of the highest importance," replied M. Daburon; and he turned to the boy.

"Can you tell us, my little friend, with what this sloop was loaded?" demanded M. Daburon.

"No, monsieur, I couldn't see, because it was decked."

"Which way was she going, up the river or down?"

"Neither, monsieur; she was moored."

"Now think well," said Gevrol. "The judge asks you which way the bow of the sloop was turned,—towards Paris or towards Marly?"

"The two ends of a sloop are alike to me."

The chief of police made a gesture of disappointment.

"At least," said he, addressing the child again, "you noticed the name of the sloop? You can read I suppose; you must surely have seen the name of the vessel you went aboard of?"

"No, I didn't see any name," said the little boy.

"If this sloop was moored a few steps from the quay," remarked M. Daburon, "it was probably noticed by the inhabitants of Bougival."

"That is true," approved the commissary.

"Besides," said Gevrol, "the sailors must have come ashore. I shall find out all about it at the wine shop. But this Capt. Gervaise, my little friend, what was he like?"

"Like all the sailors hereabouts, monsieur."

The child was preparing to depart, when the judge recalled him.

"Before you depart, my child, tell me, have you spoken to any one of this meeting before to-day?"

"I told all to mamma, when I got back from church, and gave her the ten sous."

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"And you have told us all the truth?" continued the judge. "You know that it is a grave matter to attempt to impose on justice, she always discovers the truth; and it is my duty to warn you that she inflicts the most terrible punishment upon liars."

The little fellow blushed, and dropped his eyes.

"I see," pursued Daburon, "that you have concealed something from us. Don't you know that the police are not to be trifled with?"

"Pardon, monsieur," cried the boy, bursting into tears,—"pardon. Don't punish me, and I will never do so again."

"Tell us, then, how you have deceived us?"

"It was not ten sous, monsieur, that the man gave me, it was twenty sous. I only gave half to mamma; and I kept the rest to buy marbles with."

"My little friend," interrupted the judge, "for this time I forgive you. But let it be a lesson for the remainder of your life. Remember it is vain to hide the truth; it always comes to light!"

CHAPTER II.

THE two last depositions awakened in Daburon's mind some slight gleams of hope. In the midst of darkness, the humblest rush-light acquires brillancy.

"I will go at once to Bougival, if you approve," suggested Gevrol.

"Perhaps it would be as well to wait a little," answered Daburon. "This man was seen on Sunday morning: we might inquire into the Widow Lerouge's movements on that day."

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Three neighbors were called. They all declared that the widow had kept her bed all Sunday. To one woman who had visited her, hearing that she was sick, she said, "Ah! I have had this day a terrible adventure." Nobody at the time attached any importance to these words.

"The man with the rings in his ears becomes more and more important," said the judge, when the women had retired. "To find him again is indispensable: this you will take care of, M. Gevrol."

"Before eight days, I shall have him," replied the chief of police, "if I have to search every vessel on the Seine, from its source to the ocean. I know the name of the captain,—Gervaise. The bureau of navigation may tell me the rest."

He was interrupted by Lecoq, who rushed into the house breathless.

"Here is Père Tabaret," said he. "I met him setting out. What a man! He wouldn't wait for the train, but paid I don't know how much for a carriage; and we drove here in fifty minutes!"

Almost immediately an old man appeared at the door, whose aspect bore little resemblance to the ideal portraits of the secret agent of police.

His round face wore an expression of perpetual astonishment, mingled with uneasiness, which would have made the fortunes of a dozen comic actors of the "Palais Royale." Scrupulously shaved, he presented a very short chin, large and good natured lips, and a nose disagreeably elevated, like the broad end of a Saxe horn. His eyes, of a dull grey, were small, bordered by rings of scarlet, and absolutely void of expression; yet they fatigued the observer by their insupportable restlessness. Thin hairs brushed flat upon his head, light as

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the fur of a rabbit, barely concealed his long ears, which were large, wide, and spreading away from the skull.

He was comfortably dressed, neat as a new franc piece, displaying linen of dazzling whiteness, and wearing silk gloves and leather gaiters. A long and massive chain of gold, of a deplorable taste, was twisted thrice round his neck, and fell in cascades to his vest-pocket.

Père Tabaret, surnamed Tirauclair, standing at the threshold, bowed almost to the ground, bending his old back into an arch, and in the humblest of voices demanded,—

"The judge of inquiry has deigned to send for me."

"Yes," replied Daburon, adding under his breath; "and, if you are a man of any ability, there is at least nothing to indicate it in your appearance."

"I am here," continued the old fellow, "completely at the service of justice."

"I wish to know," replied the judge, "whether you cannot, with more success than has attended our efforts, discover some indication that may serve to put us upon the track of the author of this atrocious crime. I will explain the—"

"Oh, I know enough of it!" interrupted Père Tabaret. "Lecoq has told me as much as I desire to to know."

"Nevertheless," commenced the commissary, "if you will permit me, I prefer to proceed without receiving any information, in order to be more fully master of my own impression. If you know another's opinion, it can't help influencing your judgment. I will, if you please, at once commence my researches, with Lecoq's assistance."

As the old fellow spoke, his little grey eyes dilated, and became brilliant as carbuncles. His face reflected an

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internal satisfaction; even his wrinkles seemed to laugh. His figure became erect, his step almost elastic, as he darted rather than walked into the second chamber.

He remained there about half an hour; then came out running, then re-entered and came out again; again re-entered, and again reappeared almost immediately. The judge could not help comparing him to a pointer on the scent; restless and active, he ran hither and thither, carrying his nose in the air, as if to discover some subtle odor left by the assassin. All the while he talked loudly and with much gesticulation, apostrophizing himself, scolding himself, uttering little cries of triumph or self-encouragement. He did not allow Lecoq to have a moment's rest. He wanted this or that or the other thing. He demanded paper and a pencil. Then he wanted a spade; and finally he cried out for plaster of Paris and a bottle of oil. With these he left the cottage.

When more than an hour had elapsed, the judge of inquiry began to lose patience, and asked what had become of the amateur detective.

"He is on the road," replied the brigadier, "lying flat in the mud. He has mixed the plaster in a plate. He says he is nearly finished, and that he is coming back presently."

Tabaret entered almost instantly, joyous, triumphant, looking at least twenty years younger. Lecoq followed him, carrying with the utmost precaution a large pannier.

"I have it!" said he to the judge, "completely. It is as plain as noonday. Lecoq, my lad, put the pannier on the table."

Gevrol at this moment returned from his expedition equally delighted.

"I am on the track of the man with the rings in his

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ears," said he; "the sloop went down the river. I have obtained an exact description of Capt. Gervaise."

"What have you done, M. Tabaret?" said the judge of inquiry.

The old fellow carefully emptied upon the table the contents of the pannier,—a huge lump of potter's clay, several large sheets of paper, and three or four small morsels of plaster yet damp. Standing behind this table, he presented a grotesque resemblance to a mountebank conjurer, who in the public squares makes puddings in hats, swallows swords, and eats fire. His dress was in a singular state; he was mud to the chin.

"In the first place," said he, at last, in a tone of affected modesty, "robbery has had nothing to do with the crime that occupies our attention."

"On the contrary,"—muttered Gevrol.

"I shall prove it," continued Père Tabaret, "by the evidence. By-and-by I shall offer my humble opinion as to the real motive.

"In the second place, the assassin arrived here before half-past nine; that is to say, before the rain fell. No more than M. Gevrol have I been able to discover traces of muddy footsteps; but under the table, on the spot where his feet rested, I find dust. We are thus assured of the hour. The widow did not expect her visitor. She had commenced undressing, and was about to wind up her cuckoo clock when he knocked."

"These are absolute details!" cried the commissary.

"But easily established," replied the amateur. "Examine this cuckoo clock; it is one of those which run fourteen or fifteen hours at most. Now it is more than probable, it is certain, that the widow wound it up every evening before going to bed.

"How, then, should the clock have stopped at nine?

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She must have touched it at that hour. At the moment she was drawing the chain, the assassin knocked. In proof, I show this chair below the clock, and on the seat a very plain mark of a foot. Now look at the dress of the victim. The waist of her gown is taken off. In order to open the door more quickly, she did not wait to put it on again, but hastily threw an old shawl over her shoulders."

"Sapristi!" exclaimed the brigadier, evidently filled with admiration.

"The widow," continued the old fellow, "knew the person who knocked. Her haste to open the door gives rise to this conjecture; what follows proves it. The assassin then gained admission without difficulty. He was a young man, a little above the middle height, elegantly dressed. He wore on that evening a high hat. He carried an umbrella, and smoked a trabucos with a cigar-holder."

"Ridiculous!" cried Gevrol. "This is too strong."

"Too strong for you perhaps," retorted Père Tabaret. "At all events, it is the truth. If you have not been minute in your examinations, there is no reason why I shouldn't be. I search, and I find. Too strong, say you? Well, deign to glance at these morsels of damp plaster. They represent the heels of the boots worn by the assassin, of which I found a most perfect impression near the ditch, where the key was picked up. On these sheets of paper, I have marked in outline the imprint of the foot which I cannot take up, because it is in the gravel.

"Look! heel high, instep pronounced, sole small and narrow,—an elegant boot, belonging to a foot well cared for evidently. Look for this impression all along the

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road; and you will find it twice repeated. Then you will find it five times repeated in the garden; and these foot-prints prove, by the way, that the stranger knocked not at the door, but at the window-shutter, beneath which shone a gleam of light. Near the entrance of the garden, the man made a leap to avoid a square flower-bed; the point of the foot, more deeply imprinted than usual, shows it. He leaped more than two yards with ease, proving that he is active, and therefore young."

Père Tabaret spoke now in a low voice, but clear and penetrating; and his eye glanced from one to the other of his auditors, watching the impression he was making.

"Does the hat astonish you, Gevrol?" pursued Père Tabaret. "Just look at this circle traced in the dust on the marble of the secretary. That was where he placed his hat: so we arrive at the shape and size of the crown; and the height is, at least, presumable. Now the assassin put his hands on the top shelf of the cupboard, to get at its contents. If he had been a very tall man, he could have seen them without touching the shelf; and, if a very short man, he would have stood upon a chair; consequently he must have been a little above the middle height. You seem troubled about the umbrella and the cigar-holder; but they are very simple. This lump of earth preserves an admirable impression, not only of the point, but even of the little wooden shield which holds the silk. Then as for the cigar, here is the end of a Trabucos that I found in the ashes. Is it bitten? No. Has it been moistened with saliva? No. Then he who smoked it used a cigar-holder."

Lecoq was unable to conceal his enthusiastic admiration, and noiselessly rubbed his hands. The commissary

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appeared stupefied, while the judge was delighted. Gevrol's face, on the contrary, was sensibly elongated. As for the brigadier, he was overwhelmed.

" Now," continued the old fellow, " follow me closely. We have traced the young man into the house. How he explained his presence at this hour, I do not know; this much is certain, he told the widow he had not dined. The honest woman was delighted to hear it, and at once set to work to prepare a meal. This meal was not for herself; for in the cupboard I find the remains of her dinner. She had dined on fish: The autopsy will confirm the truth of this conjecture. You can see the rest for yourself. There is but one glass on the table, and one knife. Who was this young man? Evidently the widow looked upon him as a man of rank superior to her own; for, in the small plate-closet is a table-cloth suitable enough for her, but not at all good enough for him. For her guest, she brought out one of white linen, and much handsomer. For him she sets this magnificent glass—a present, no doubt—and this knife with the ivory handle."

" That is all true," murmured the judge,—" very true."

" Now, then, we have got the young man seated. He began by drinking a glass of wine, while the widow was putting her pan on the fire. Then, his heart failing him, he called for brandy, and swallowed about five *petits verres*. After an internal struggle of ten minutes (the time it must have taken to cook the ham and eggs to the point they have reached). the young man arose and approached the widow, who was leaning forward over her cooking. He stabbed her twice in the back; but she was not killed instantly. She half arose, seizing the assassin by the hands; while he drew back, lifting her rudely,

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and then hurling her down in the position in which you see her.

"This short struggle is indicated by the posture of the body; for, wounded in the back, it is on her back she ought naturally to have fallen. The weapon used was sharp and pointed, and, unless I am deceived, was the end of a foil, broken off and sharpened. By wiping the weapon upon his victim's skirt, the assassin leaves us this indication. He was not, however, hurt in the struggle, though the victim must have clung with a death-grip to his hands; but, as he has not left his gray gloves,"—

"Gloves! Why, this is romance," exclaimed Gevrol.

"Have you examined the dead woman's finger-nails, M. Gevrol? No. Well, do so, and then tell me whether I am deceived.

"The woman, now dead, we come to the object of her assassination. What did this well-dressed young gentleman want? Money? valuables? No! no! a hundred times, no! What he wanted, what he sought, and what he found, were papers, documents, letters, which he knew to be in the possession of this unfortunate woman. To find them, he has overturned every thing, upset the cupboards, unfolded the linen, broken open the secretary, of which he could not find the key, and even emptied the mattress of the bed.

"At last he found them; and then what did he do? Burned them, of course; not in the chimney, but in the little stove in the front chamber. His end accomplished, what does he then? He flies, carrying with him all that he finds valuable, to mislead pursuit, and baffle detection, by indicating a robbery. Having bundled them together, he wrapped these valuables in the napkin which was to have served him at dinner; and, blowing out th

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candle, he fled, locking the door, and afterwards throwing the key into the ditch.

"That is my idea of the case, M. the judge."

"M. Tabaret," said the judge, "your investigation is admirable; and I am persuaded your inferences are correct."

"Ah!" cried Lecoq, "is he not colossal? Papa Tirauclair?"

"Pyramidal!" cried Gevrol ironically. "I fear, however, your well-dressed young man must have been much embarrassed in carrying a bundle at once so inconvenient and so remarkable."

"He did not carry it a hundred leagues," responded Père Tabaret. "You may well believe, that, to reach the railway station, he would not risk taking the omnibus. No, he returned on foot by the shortest way, to the edge of the water. Now, on arriving at the Seine, it will not be too strong, I hope, to suppose his first care was to throw into it this tell-tale bundle."

"Do you believe so, Papa Tirauclair?" demanded Gevrol.

"I will wager on it; and the best evidence of my belief is, that I have sent three men, under the surveillance of a gendarme to drag the Seine at the nearest spot. If they succeed in finding the bundle, I have promised them a recompense."

"From your own pocket, old enthusiast?"

"Yes, M. Gevrol, from my own pocket."

"If they find this bundle, however,—" murmured the judge.

He was interrupted by the entrance of a gendarme.

"Here," said he,—"here is a soiled table-napkin, filled with plate, silver, and jewels, which these men

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have found; they claim the hundred francs' reward, promised them."

Père Tabaret took from his pocket-book a bank bill, which he handed to the gendarme.

"Now," demanded he, ignoring M. Gevrol with a superb disdain, "what thinks M. the judge of inquiry?"

"That, thanks to your penetration, we shall come to the point,—

He did not finish. The doctor summoned to make the post mortem examination appeared.

That unpleasant task accomplished, it only confirmed the assertions and conjectures of Père Tabaret. The doctor explained as he had the position of the body. In his opinion, there had been a brief but fierce struggle. He pointed out a bluish circle, hardly perceptible, round the neck of the victim produced apparently by the powerful grasp of the murderer; then he declared the Widow Lerouge had dined three hours before being struck.

Nothing now remained except to collect the fragments of evidence received, which might at a later period confound the culprit.

Père Tabaret examined with extreme care the dead woman's fingers; and, using infinite precaution, he even extracted from beneath the nails several small particles of gray kid. The largest of these fragments was not above two millemetres in length; but their color was easily distinguishable. He put aside also the part of the dress upon which the assassin had wiped the weapon. These, with the bundle recovered from the Seine, and the cast of the footprints taken by the old fellow, were all the traces the murderer had left behind him.

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It was nothing; but this nothing was enormous in the eyes of M. Daburon: and he had strong hopes of discovering the culprit. The greatest obstacle to success in the unravelling of mysterious crime is in mistaking the motive. If the researches take at the first step a false direction, they are diverted further and further from the truth, in proportion to the length they are followed. Thanks to Père Tabaret, the judge felt confident that he was in the right path.

Night had come on. The judge had nothing more to do at Jonchère; but Gevrol, who still clung to his own opinion of the guilt of the man with the rings in his ears, declared he would remain at Bougival. He determined to employ the evening in visiting the different wine shops, and finding if possible new witnesses.

At the moment of departure, after the commissary and the entire party had received their congèe from M. Daburon, the latter asked Père Tabaret to accompany him.

"I was about to solicit that honor," replied the old fellow. They set out together; and naturally the crime which had been discovered, and with which they were mutually preoccupied, formed the subject of their conversation.

"Can we, or can we not, ascertain the antecedents of this woman?" repeated Père Tabaret. "All depends upon that, after all!"

"We shall ascertain them, if the grocer has told the truth," replied M. Daburon. "If the Widow Lerouge has had a husband a sailor, and there is now a son of hers named Jacques in the navy, the minister of marine can furnish information that will lead to its discovery. I will write to the minister this very night."

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They arrived at the station at Rueil, and took their places in the train. They were so fortunate as to secure a compartment to themselves.

But Père Tabaret was not disposed for conversation. He reflected, he sought, he combined; and in his face might easily be read the working of his thoughts. The judge felt singularly attracted by this eccentric old man, whose very original taste had led him to devote his services to the bureau of secret police in the Rue Jerusalem.

"M. Tabaret," demanded he brusquely, "have you been long associated with the police?"

"Nine years, M. the judge,—more than nine years; and permit me to confess I am a little surprised that you have never before heard of me."

"I certainly know you by reputation," answered M. Daburon; "and it was in consequence of hearing of your talent that the excellent idea of asking your assistance occurred to me. But what was the occasion of your adopting this employment?"

"Chagrin, M. the judge, isolation, ennui. Ah! I have not always been happy!"

"I hear, though, that you are rich."

The old fellow heaved a deep sigh, as he recalled what seemed to him the cruelest deception. "I am well off, monsieur," replied he; "but I have not always been. Until I was forty-five years old, my life was a series of absurd and useless privations. I had a father who ruined my youth, wasted my manhood, and made me the most pitiable of human creatures."

There are men who can never divest themselves of their professional habits. M. Daburon was at all times and seasons a little of a judge of inquiry.

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"How, M. Tabaret," said he, "your father the author of your misfortunes?"

"Alas, yes, monsieur! I have forgiven him long since; but once I cursed him. In the first transports of my resentment, I heaped upon his memory all the injuries that can be inspired by the most violent hatred. Even now, when I think,—but I will confide to you my history M. Daburon.

"When I was five and twenty years of age, I was earning two thousand francs a year, as clerk in a pawnbroker's. One morning my father entered my apartment, and announced to me abruptly that he was ruined, and wanted food and shelter. He appeared in despair, and declared he had done with life. I loved my father. Naturally, I strove to reassure him. I boasted of my situation, and explained to him at some length, that, while I earned the means of living, he should want for nothing; and, to commence, I insisted that henceforth we should live together. No sooner said than done; and during twenty years, the best twenty years of my life, I was encumbered with the old—"

"How? you repent of your filial conduct, M. Tabaret?"

"Yes, I do repent of it; that is to say, I wish the old wretch had received his deserts; for then he would have been poisoned by the bread which I gave him."

Daburon was unable to repress a gesture of surprise, which did not escape the old fellow's notice.

"Hear, before you condemn me," said he. "There I was at twenty-five, imposing upon myself the severest privations for sake of my father,—no more friends, no more flirtations, nothing. In the evenings, to augment our scanty revenues, I worked at copying law papers for a notary. I denied myself even the luxury

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of a cigar. Notwithstanding, the old skinflint complained without ceasing. He regretted his lost fortune. He wanted pocket-money. He wanted this, he wanted that. My utmost exertions failed to satisfy him. Ah, heaven alone knows what I have suffered! I was not born to live alone to old age, like a dog. I longed for the pleasures of a home and a family. My dream of happiness was marriage,—an adored wife, by whom I might be loved a little, innocent little ones gambolling about my knees; but pshaw! when such thoughts entered my heart and forced a tear or two from my eyes, I rebelled against myself. I said: 'My lad, when you earn but three thousand francs a year, and have an old and cherished father to support, it is your duty to stifle such desires, and remain a bachelor.' In the mean time, I fell in love. Hold, do not laugh at me. I was but thirty years of age then; and, old and ugly as I am now, I was a good looking fellow at that time. She,—she was called Hortense. I could not marry her and continue to provide for him. Who can tell what became of her? I lost sight of her. She waited long; but, alas! she was pretty and poor. When my father died, and left me free, I was an old man. The miserable, miserly old,—"

"M. Tabaret!" interrupted the judge,—"M. Tabaret!"

"Yes, yes, monsieur. I have forgiven him long ago, I am a good Christian; but you will understand my anger when I tell you, the day of his death, looking in his secretary in the hope of finding enough to bury the old hypocrite, I found a memorandum of twenty thousand francs of rent!"

"He was rich, then?"

"Yes, very rich; for that was not all: he owned near Orleans a property leased for six thousand francs a

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year. He owned besides, the house I now live in, where we lived together; and I fool, sot, imbecile, stupid animal that I was, used to pay the rent every three months to the concierge!"

"Cruel fortune!" M. Daburon could not help saying.

"Was it not, monsieur? I was robbing myself of my own money! To crown the absurdity, he left a testament, wherein he declared he had no other aim in view, in thus acting, than my advantage. He wished, he said, to habituate me to habits of good order and economy, and keep me from the commission of follies. And so, monsieur, I was at forty-five a rich man, who for twenty years could not accuse himself of having expended uselessly a single sou. In short, he had speculated on my good heart to rob me of my life's happiness. Bah! it is enough to disgust the human race with filial piety."

M. Tabaret's anger, albeit very real, was so highly ludicrous in its effect upon his features and gesture that the judge had much difficulty to restrain his laughter, although touched with pity at the recital.

"After all," said he, "this fortune ought to give you pleasure."

"No, monsieur, it came too late. Of what avail to have the bread when one has no longer the teeth?

"The best part of life was gone, the age of happiness had passed. I resigned my situation at the pawnbroker's, to make way for some other poor devil, and became a gentleman at large. At the end of a month, I was ennuied to death; and, to replace the interest in life I despaired of gaining, I resolved to give myself a passion, a hobby, a mania. I became a collector of books. You think perhaps, monsieur, that to take an

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interest in books a man must have studied, must be learned?"

"No, monsieur; but he must have money. I am acquainted with an illustrious bibliomaniac who actually cannot read his own name."

"It is very possible, monsieur: but I could read; and I read all the books I bought, and mine is an unique collection. It consists of all the works I could find far or near, that related aught concerning the police. Memoirs, reports, discourses, letters,—all were delightful to me; and I devoured them as Don Quixote did the books of chivalry.

"Reading these adventures so exciting and so real, I became little by little attracted towards this mysterious power which from the obscurity of the Rue Jerusalem watches over and protects society from fraud and violence,—that unseen hand that lifts the most impervious veil; that invisible eye that sees through every plot; that unknown intelligence that divines even the secrets of men's hearts, knows to a grain weight the worth of women's reputation and the price of men's integrity; that universal confidant who keeps in her secret record the most terrible as well as the most shameful confessions!

"In reading the memoirs of celebrated police agents (more attractive matter to me than the fables of our best authors) I became inspired by an enthusiastic admiration for those men, so untiring in pursuit, so fertile in expedient, who follow crime to his stronghold as relentlessly as the savages of Cooper pursue their enemies in the depths of the American forest. The desire seized me to become a wheel of this admirable machine,—a small assistance in the punishment of crime and the triumph of innocence. I have made the essay; and I

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am proud to say, monsieur, I find I have not mistaken my vocation."

"Then this employment pleases you?"

"I owe to it, monsieur, my liveliest enjoyments. Adieu ennui! Since I have abandoned the pursuit of old worm-eaten books for this to which I am equal, I am happy. I shrug the shoulder when I see a foolish fellow pay twenty-five francs for the right of hunting a hare. What a prize! Give me the hunting of a man! *That* calls the faculties into play, and the victory is not inglorious! The game in my sport is worth the hunter. He has against him intelligence, force, and cunning. The arms are nearly equal. Ah! if people knew the excitement of these parties of hide and seek which are played between the criminal and the detective, everybody would be wanting employment at the bureau of secret police. The misfortune is, that the art is being lost because fine crimes are rare. The race of strong criminals, fearless and ingenious, has given place to a mob of vulgar pickers and stealers, hardly worth hunting after,—blunderers as well as cowards, who sign their names to their misdeeds, and even leave you their *cartes de visite*. There is no merit in catching them: their work examined, nothing remains but their arrest."

"It seems to me," said M. Daburon, smiling, "that cur assassin is not such a bungler."

"This case, monsieur, is an exception; and I shall have the greater delight in tracing him: and I will trace him, though I should compromise myself in the pursuit. For I ought to confess, M. le judge," added he with a ludicrous embarrassment, "that I do not boast to my friends of my exploits, but conceal them as carefully as possible. They would join hands with me less warmly did they know that Tirauclair and Tabaret are one."

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Insensibly the crime became again the subject of conversation. It was agreed, that, in the morning, Père Tabaret should instal himself at Bougival. He could by hard work examine all the peasants in the country in eight days. On his side the judge promised to keep him advised of the least evidence that transpired, and recall him, if by any accident he should procure the papers of the Widow Lerouge.

"To you, M. Tabaret," said the judge in conclusion, "I shall be always visible. If you have any thing to speak of, do not hesitate to come at night as well as during the day. I rarely go abroad; and you will always find me at home, Rue Jacob. When not in my office at the Palais de Justice, I shall leave orders for your admittance whenever you present yourself."

The train entered the depot at this moment. M. Daburon having called a hackney coach, offered a place to Père Tabaret. The old fellow declined.

"It is not worth while," replied he; "for I live, as I have had the honor to tell you, Rue St. Lazare, two steps from this."

"Till to-morrow, then!" said M. Daburon.

"Till to-morrow," replied Père Tabaret; and he added, "We shall find him!"

CHAPTER III.

PERE TABARET'S dwelling was in truth, as he said, not four minutes' walk from the railway terminus of St. Lazare. He was the owner of the property,—a fine house, carefully kept, and which must have yielded a fine revenue, although the rents on the quarter were not extravagant.

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The house being much too large for the old fellow, he occupied only the ground floor,— a suite of handsome apartments, well arranged and comfortably furnished, of which the principal ornament was his collection of books. He lived very simply from taste as well as habit, served by an old domestic to whom on great occasions the portress lent a helping hand.

Nothing in the house gave the slightest indication of the avocations of its proprietor. Besides, even the humblest agent of police would be expected to possess a degree of acuteness for which no one gave M. Tabaret credit. Indeed, they mistook for incipient idiocy his continual absence of mind.

It is true that all who knew him remarked the singularity of his habits. His constant expeditions had given to his proceedings an appearance at once eccentric and mysterious. Never was young libertine more irregular in his habits than this old man. He came or failed to come to his meals, ate it mattered not what or at what hour. He went out at every hour of the day and night, often slept abroad, and even disappeared for entire weeks at a time. Then he received the strangest visitors,—odd looking men of suspicious appearance, and fellows of ill-favored and sinister aspect.

This irregular way of life had robbed the old fellow of some consideration. Many believed they saw in him a shameless libertine, who dispensed his revenues in disreputable places of amusement. They exclaimed, "Is it not a shame, a man of that age?"

He was aware of these reports, and laughed at them. This did not, however, prevent many of his acquaintances from seeking his society and paying court to him. When invited to dinner, he almost invariably refused.

He saw but little of his tenants, with one exception,

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where he cultivated the greatest intimacy, so great indeed that he was almost as much at home in his neighbor's apartments as his own. This exception was made in favor of a widow lady, who had for more than fifteen years occupied the third floor. She was called Madame Gerdy, and lived with her son Noel, whom she worshipped.

Noel Gerdy was a man thirty-three years of age, and older in appearance, tall and well-made, with a noble and intelligent face, large black eyes, and black hair which curled naturally. An advocate, he passed for having great talent, and greater industry, and had already gained a certain amount of notoriety. An obstinate worker, cold and meditative, devoted to his profession, he affected, with some ostentation, perhaps, a great rigidity of principle, and austerity of manners.

In Madame Gerdy's family, Père Tabaret almost believed himself included. He looked upon himself as a parent, and upon Noel as a son. In spite of her fifty years, he had often thought of asking the hand of this charming widow, and was restrained less by the fear of a refusal than its consequences. To propose and be rejected would sever the existing relations, so pleasurable to him. However, he had in his will, which was deposited with his notary, constituted this young advocate his sole legatee; with the sole condition of paying an annual prize of two thousand francs to the police agent who during the year had drawn to light the most obscure and mysterious crime.

Short as was the distance to his house, Père Tabaret was a good quarter of an hour in reaching it. On leaving the judge his thoughts reverted to the scene of the murder; and, so blinded was the old fellow to external objects, that the passers by were obliged to push him

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aside in order to pursue their way: thus his progress was a slow one.

He repeated to himself for the fiftieth time the words of the Widow Lerouge, as reported by the milk-maid, "If I wished for anything more, I could have it."

"All is in that," murmured he. "The Widow Lerouge possessed some important secret, which persons rich and powerful had the strongest motives for concealing. This secret was her fortune; by means of this she made her powerful friends sing to her tune. She has either threatened or wearied them, and they have silenced her forever! But of what nature was this secret, and how did she become possessed of it? Might she not in her youth have been a servant in some great family, where she has seen, heard, or surprised something. What? Evidently there is a woman at the bottom. May she not have assisted her mistress in some intrigue? What more probable? And in that case the affair becomes complicated. Not only must the woman be found, but the lover; for it is the lover who has moved in this affair. It must be, or I am deceived, a noble personage. A man of inferior rank would have paid the assassin. This man has not hung back; he himself has struck, avoiding the mistake of an accomplice. He is a courageous man, full of audacity and coolness; for the crime has been admirably executed.

"The gallant left nothing behind of a nature to compromise him seriously; but for me, Gevrol would have seen in the assassination the work of a robber, and overlooked the real motive for the crime! No," continued the good man, "it must be the issue of an amour. Time will show."

Père Tabaret mounted the steps in front of his house. The portress, seated in her *loge*, and chatting with her

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husband, saw him through the window by the light of the lamp which hung over the door.

"Hold," said the porter, "here is the proprietor returned."

"So it seems," returned the portress. "His princess does not want him this evening. He looks troubled about something."

"It is positively indecent," said the porter, "for a man of his years to act in the manner he does. Oh! he's got softening of the brain. One of these fine mornings he will find his way to the insane asylum in a straight waistcoat."

"Look at him now!" interrupted the portress—"look at him now, in the open street!"

The old fellow had stopped at the extremity of the porch. He had taken off his hat, and, while talking to himself, gesticulated violently.

"No," said he to himself, "I have not yet laid hold of the clew; but I am near it. I burn; but I am not at the fire yet."

Admitted by the portress, he passed on to the door of his apartments, of which he rang the bell, forgetting that he had his pass-key in his pocket. His housekeeper came and opened it.

"Hey day, monsieur. Is it you, and at this hour?"

"Hey day, madame. And what of that?" demanded the old fellow.

"Do you know," said the servant, "that it is half-past eight o'clock? I thought you were not coming back this evening. Have you dined?"

"No, not yet."

"Fortunately I have kept your dinner warm. You can sit down to table."

Père Tabaret seated himself, and was helped to soup;

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but, mounting his hobby-horse again, he forgot to eat, and remained arrested by an idea, his spoon in the air,

"He is certainly touched in the head," thought Mannette. "Look at that stupid air. Who would act in such a manner that was in his senses?"

She struck him on the shoulder, bawling in his ear, as if he were deaf,—

"You do not eat. Are you not hungry?"

"Yes, yes," answered he, trying mechanically to escape the voice that sounded in his ears, "I am very hungry; for since morning I have been obliged"—

He interrupted himself, remaining with his mouth open, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"You have been obliged—?" repeated Mannette.

"Thunder!" cried he, raising his clenched hands towards the ceiling,—"thunder of heaven! I have it now."

His movement was so violent and sudden that the housekeeper was alarmed, and retired to the further end of the room, near the door.

"Yes," continued he, "it is certain there is a child!"

Mannette approached quickly.

"An infant?" she asked in astonishment.

"Ah, so," cried he in a furious tone. "What are you doing there? Has your hardihood come to this that you pick up the words which escape me? Do me the favor to retire to your kitchen, and stay there until I call you."

"He is going crazy!" thought Mannette, as she disappeared very quickly.

Père Tabaret returned to the table. The soup was completely cold; but he swallowed it in large spoonfuls, without remarking it.

"Stupid!" said he to himself. "Why did I not think

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of it before? Poor humanity! I am growing old; and my toils are less sharp than they used to be. But it is clear as the day: the circumstances all point to that conclusion."

He rapped with his spoon upon the table: the servant reappeared.

"The roast," demanded he, "and leave me to myself."

"Yes," continued he, furiously carving a leg of Prèsalè mutton,—"yes, there was an infant; and here is the history. The Widow Lerouge, when a young woman, is in the service of a great lady, immensely rich. Her husband, a sailor, probably had departed on a long voyage. The lady had a lover—found herself *enciente*. She confided in the Widow Lerouge, and, with her assistance, accomplished a clandestine *accouchement*."

He called again.

"Mannette, the dessert, and get out!"

Certainly such a master was unworthy of so excellent a cook as Mannette. He would have been puzzled to say what he had eaten for dinner, or even what he was eating at this moment; it was a preserve of pears.

"But what," murmured he, "has become of the child? Has it been destroyed? No; for the Widow Lerouge, an accomplice in an infanticide, would be no longer formidable. The child has been preserved, and confided to the care of our widow, by whom it has been reared. They have been able to take the infant away from her, but not the proofs of its birth and its existence. Here is the opening. The father is the man of the fine carriage; the mother is the lady who came with the handsome young man. Ha! ha! I can well believe the dear old dame wanted for nothing. She had a secret worth a farm in Brie. But the old lady

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was extravagant; her expenses and her demands have increased year by year. Poor humanity! She has leaned upon the staff too heavily, and broken it. She has threatened. They have been frightened, and said, 'Let there be an end of this!' But who has charged himself with the commission? The papa? No: he is too old. By jupiter! the son,— the child himself! He would save his mother, the brave boy! He has slain the witness and burnt the proofs!"

Mannette all this time, her ear to the keyhole, listened with all her soul; from time to time she gleaned a word, an oath, the noise of a blow upon the table; but that was all.

"For certain," thought she, "his women are running in his head."

Her curiosity overcame her prudence. Hearing no more, she ventured to open the door a little way. The old fellow caught her in the very act.

"Monsieur wants his coffee?" stammered she timidly.

"Yes, you may bring it to me," he answered.

He attempted to swallow his coffee at a gulp, but scalded himself so severely that the pain brought him suddenly from speculation to reality.

"Thunder!" grumbled he; "but it is hot! Devil take the case! it has set me beside myself. They are right in the office, when they say I take too strong an interest in the investigations. Who but I should have, by the sole exercise of observation and reason, established the whole history of the assassination? Certainly not Gevrol, poor man! He must, if he has any professional feeling, be deeply humiliated. Shall I seek M. Daburon? No, not yet. I must sift to the bottom all the particulars and arrange my ideas systematically be-

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fore meeting him again. Upon the other hand, if I sit here alone, this history will keep me in a fever of speculation. My faith! I will call upon Madame Gerdy: she has been ailing for some days. I will have a chat with Noel, and that will brighten me up a little."

He got up from the table, and took his hat and cane.

"Monsieur is going out?" demanded Mannette.

"Yes."

"Monsieur will not return until late?"

"Possibly."

"But monsieur will return?"

"I do not know."

One minute later Père Tabaret rang at his friend Madame Gerdy's apartments.

Madame Gerdy lived in respectable style. She possessed a competence; and her son's business, already large, had made it a fortune. She had few acquaintances, and, with the exception of one or two friends, occasionally invited to dinner, received no visitors. During the fifteen years that Père Tabaret came familiarly to the house, he had encountered only the curate of the parish, an old professor, and Madame Gerdy's brother, a colonel retired from service.

When these three visitors called upon the same evening, an event somewhat rare, they played at "Boston," or made a party at piquet. Noel, however, seldom remained in the salon, but shut himself up after dinner in his study, and immersed himself in his law papers. He was supposed to work far into the night. Often in winter his lamp was not extinguished before dawn.

Mother and son absolutely lived for one another, as all who knew them took pleasure in repeating.

They loved and honored Noel for the care he bestowed upon his mother,—for his more than filial de-

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votion,—for the sacrifices which all supposed he made in living at his age like an old man.

The neighbors were in the habit of contrasting the conduct of this exemplary young man with that of Père Tabaret, the incorrigible old rake, the gallant in the peruke.

As for Madame Gerdy, she saw nothing but her son in all the world. Her love had actually taken the form of worship. In Noel, she believed she saw united all the physical and moral perfections. To her he seemed of a superior order to the rest of humanity. If he spoke, she listened and was silent: his word was a command, his advice a decree of Providence. To care for her son, study his tastes, anticipate his wishes, was the sole aim of her life. Noel was her existence.

She was a mother.

"Is Madame Gerdy visible?" demanded Père Tabaret of the young girl who opened the door; and, without waiting for an answer, he walked into the room like a man assured that his presence cannot be inopportune, and ought to be agreeable.

A single lamp gave light to the salon, which was not in its accustomed order. The marble-top table, usually in the middle of the room, was rolled into a corner. Madame Gerdy's large arm-chair was near the window: a newspaper, all crumpled, lay before it on the carpet.

The old amateur took in the whole at a glance.

"Has any accident occurred?" demanded he of the young girl.

"Do not speak to me, monsieur: we have had such a fright! oh, what a fright!"

"What was it? speak quickly!"

"You know that madame has been ailing for more

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than a month. She has eaten I may say almost nothing; this morning, even, she said to me"—

"Well, well! but this evening?"

"After dinner madame came into the salon as usual. She sat down and took up one of M. Noel's newspapers. Scarcely had she begun to read, when she uttered a great cry,—oh, a terrible cry, monsieur! We ran into the salon, and found madame where she had fallen upon the carpet as if dead. M. Noel raised her in his arms, and carried her into her chamber. I wanted to fetch a doctor; but he said there was no need: he knew what was the matter with her."

"And how is she now?"

"She has come to her senses; that is to say; I suppose so; for M. Noel made me leave the room. All that I do know is, that she kept talking all the time, and talking very loudly too; for I heard her say,—Ah, monsieur, but it is all so very strange!"

"What is strange?"

"What I heard Madame Gerdy say to M. Noel.

"Ah ha! my belle!" sneered Père Tabaret; "so you listen at key-holes, do you?"

"No, monsieur! no indeed, I swear to you; but madame cried out like one lost. She said,"—

"My girl," said Père Tabaret, "one never hears any thing good through key-holes. Mannette can tell you as much."

The poor girl, thoroughly confused, sought to excuse herself.

"Enough, enough!" said the good man. "Return to your work: you need not disturb M. Noel; I can wait for him very well here.

And, satisfied with the reproof he had administered,

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he picked up the newspaper, and installed himself in the chimney-corner, placing the lamp so as to read with ease.

A minute had scarcely elapsed when he in his turn bounded in his chair, and uttered a cry of instinctive terror and surprise.

These were the first words that met his eye.

"A horrible crime has plunged in grief and consternation the little village of La Jonchère. A poor widow, named Lerouge, who enjoyed the general esteem and love of the community, has been assassinated in her own house. The officers of the law made the usual preliminary investigations; and, from the information we have been able to gather, we believe justice is already on the track of the authors of this dastardly crime."

"Thunder!" cried Père Tabaret to himself, "can it be that Madame Gerdy?"—

The idea was but a gleam of lightning, dismissed as soon as formed; he fell back into the arm-chair, and, raising his shoulders, murmured,—

"This affair of Jonchère is driving me out of my senses! I can think of nothing but this infernal Widow Lerouge. I see her now in every thing."

In the mean while, an uncontrollable curiosity made him peruse the entire newspaper. He found nothing, with the exception of these lines, to justify or explain even the slightest emotion.

"It is an extremely singular coincidence, at the same time," thought the incorrigible police agent. Then, remarking that the newspaper was slightly torn at the lower part, and crushed, as if by a convulsive grasp, he repeated,—

"It is strange!"

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At this moment the door of Madame Gerdy's room opened, and Noel appeared on the threshold.

Without doubt the accident to his mother had greatly excited him; for he was very pale and his countenance, ordinarily so calm, wore an expression of profound sorrow. He appeared surprised to see Père Tabaret.

"Ah, my dear Noel!" cried the old fellow. "Calm my inquietude. How is your mother?"

"Madame Gerdy is as well as can be expected."

"Madame Gerdy!" repeated the old fellow with an air of astonishment; but he continued, "It is plain you have been seriously alarmed."

"In truth," replied the advocate, seating himself, "I have experienced a rude shock."

Noel was making visibly the greatest efforts to appear calm, to listen to the old fellow, and to answer him. Père Tabaret, as much disquieted on his side, perceived nothing.

"At least, my dear boy," said he, "tell me how this happened?"

The young man hesitated a moment, as if consulting with himself. No doubt he was unprepared for this point blank question, and knew not what answer to make; at last he replied,—

"Madame Gerdy has suffered a severe shock in learning from a paragraph in this newspaper that a woman in whom she takes a strong interest has been assassinated."

"Ah!" cried Père Tabaret.

The old fellow was in a fever of embarrassment. He wanted to question Noel, but was restrained by the fear of revealing the secret of his association with the police. Indeed he had almost betrayed himself by the eagerness with which he exclaimed,— .

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"What! your mother knew the Widow Lerouge?"

By an effort he restrained himself, and with difficulty dissembled his satisfaction; for he was delighted to find himself so unexpectedly on the trace of the antecedents of the victim of La Jonchère.

"She was," continued Noel, "the slave of Madame Gerdy, devoted to her body and soul! She would have thrown herself in the fire at a sign from her hand."

"Then you, my dear friend, you knew this honest woman?"

"I have not seen her for a long time," replied Noel; "but I knew her well; I ought even to say I loved her tenderly. She was my nurse."

"She, this woman?" stammered Père Tabaret.

This time he was thunderstruck. The Widow Lerouge Noel's nurse? He was playing with fortune. Providence had evidently chosen him for its instrument, and was leading him by the hand. He was about to obtain all the information, in one half-hour, which he had almost despaired of ever procuring. He remained seated before Noel stunned and speechless. At length he remembered, that, unless he would compromise himself, he must break the silence.

"It is a great misfortune," murmured he.

"For Madame Gerdy, I know nothing of that; but, for me, it is an overwhelming misfortune! I am struck to the heart by the blow which has slain this poor woman. Her death, M. Tabaret, has annihilated my dreams of the future, and overthrown my most cherished hopes. I have to perform a solemn duty,—to avenge myself for cruel outrages. Her death breaks the weapon in my hands, and reduces me to despair, to impotence. Alas! I am indeed unfortunate."

"You unfortunate?" cried Père Tabaret, singularly

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affected by the sadness of his dear Noel. "In heaven's name, what has happened to you?"

"I suffer," murmured the advocate, "not only from injustice that can never be repaired, but from dread of calumny that cannot be repudiated. I am defenceless. I shall be accused of inventing falsehood, of being an ambitious intriguer, having no regard for truth, no scruples of conscience."

Père Tabaret was puzzled. What connection could possibly exist between Noel's honor and the assassination at Jonchère? His brain was in a whirl. A thousand troubled and confused ideas jostled one another in inextricable confusion.

"Come, come, Noel," said he, "collect yourself. Calumny threatens you? Nonsense! Have you not friends? Am I not here? Have confidence in me. It will be strange, indeed, if between us two—"

The advocate started to his feet, inflamed by a sudden resolution.

"Yes," interrupted he, "you shall know the secret that is stifling me. The rôle I have imposed upon myself irritates and confounds me. I have need of a friend to console, a counsellor to advise me; for one is a bad judge of his own cause: and this crime has plunged me into an abyss of hesitation."

"You know," replied Père Tabaret, "that I regard you as a son. Command me, my dear Noel, as if I were indeed your father."

"Know then," commenced the advocate,—"but no, not here: what I have to say must not be overheard. Let us go into my study."

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CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Noel and Père Tabaret were seated face to face in the small apartment devoted to Noel's business, and the door had been carefully locked, the old fellow began to feel uneasy.

"If your mother should require any thing," said he.

"If Madame Gerdy rings," replied the young man, "the servant will attend to her wants."

This indifference, this coldness, confounded Père Tabaret, accustomed as he was to the interchange of affection between mother and son.

"For heaven's sake, Noel," said he, "calm yourself. Do not allow yourself to be overcome by a feeling of irritation. You have, I see, some little pique against your mother, which will be forgotten to-morrow. Don't speak of her in this icy tone; but tell me what you mean by calling her Madame Gerdy?"

"What I mean?" replied the advocate in a hollow tone,—"what I mean?"

He quitted his arm-chair, took several strides across the floor of the little chamber, returned to his place near the old fellow, and said,—

"Because, M. Tabaret, Madame Gerdy is not my mother!"

This sentence fell like a blow of a heavy club on the head of the amateur: he was paralyzed.

"Oh!" said he, in the tone one assumes when rejecting an absurd proposition, "do you dream of what you say, Noel? Is it credible? Is it probable?"

"It is improbable," replied Noel with peculiar emphasis: "it is incredible, if you will; but it is true. For thirty-three years, ever since my birth, this woman has

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played a most marvellous and unworthy comedy, to ennoble and enrich her son,—for she has a son,—and to despoil, to plunder me!"

"My friend,"—continued Père Tabaret, who in the background of the picture presented by this singular revelation saw again the phantom of the murdered Widow Lerouge.

But Noel heard not, and seemed hardly in a state to hear. The young man, usually so cold, so self-contained, could not control his anger. At the sound of his own voice, he became animated, as a good horse might at the jingling of his harness.

"Was ever man," continued he, "more cruelly deceived, more miserably duped, than I have been,—I who have so loved this woman? How I have sought for evidences of affection to lavish on her, who was sacrificing me to her own selfish ambition for her son! How she has laughed at me! Her infamy dates from the moment when for the first time she took me on her knees; and, until these few days past, she has sustained without faltering her execrable rôle: her love for me, hypocrisy! her devotion falsehood! her caresses lies. And how I have worshipped her! Ah! why can I not recall the innocent kisses of my childhood, the devotion of my youth, the sacrifices of my manhood, given in exchange for her Judas' kisses? And for what was all this heroism of deception, this caution, this duplicity? To betray me, more securely to despoil me; to rob me; to give to her illegitimate offspring all that lawfully appertained to me,—a noble name, a princely inheritance!"

"We are burning!" thought Père Tabaret, who was fast relapsing into the *collaborateur* of M. Gevrol; then aloud he said,—

"This is terribly serious, my dear Noel. To credit

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what you have said, we must believe Madame Gerdy possessed of an amount of audacity and ability rarely united in one individual. She must have been assisted, advised, compelled perhaps. Who have been her accomplices? She could never have accomplished this herself; her husband perhaps himself?"

"Her husband!" interrupted Noel, with a bitter laugh. "Ah! you have believed her a widow. Pshaw! She never had a husband. Père Gerdy never had an existence. I am illegitimate, my dear Tabaret, thrice base born,—Noel, son of a *femme couvert*, and an unknown father!"

"Ah!" cried the old fellow; "this then is the occasion of your marriage with Mademoiselle Levernois being delayed these four years?"

"Yes, my friend, that was the cause. And what misfortunes might have been averted by this marriage with a young girl whom I love! Had I wedded her before making this abominable discovery, I should not have wasted all my affection on her that I have called my mother. When she told me I was not the son of this imaginary individual, this M. Gerdy, she wept, she accused herself, she seemed ready to die of grief and shame; and I, poor fool! dry her tears, excuse her to her own eyes, console her with my caresses! No, she had no husband: such women have no husbands. She was the Count de Commarin's mistress; and, on the day when he quitted her, he threw to her three hundred thousand francs, the price of her degradation!"

Noel would have continued to pour forth these furious denunciations; but his volubility was arrested by the old fellow. He felt he was coming to a history in all points similar to that which he had imagined; and his

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impatience to gratify his vanity, in discovering how nearly he had divined the facts, made him almost forget to express any sympathy for his friend's misfortunes.

"My dear boy," said he, "let us not digress. You ask me for advice; and I am perhaps the best adviser you could have chosen. Come, then, to the point. How have you learned this? Have you proofs of what you state? where are they?"

The decided tone of the old fellow would no doubt have awakened Noel's attention at any other time; but he was off his guard: he had not leisure to stop or to reflect. He answered promptly,—

"I have known the truth for three weeks. I made the discovery by chance. I have important moral proofs; but they are mere presumptive evidence. A word from the Widow Lerouge, one single word, would have rendered them decisive. This word, she cannot pronounce, since they have killed her; but she has said it to me. Of what avail? Now, Madame Gerdy will deny all. I know her; with her head on the block, she will deny it. My father doubtless will turn against me. I am myself morally convinced. I *was* strong in evidence; but this crime renders vain my certainty, utterly destroys my proofs!"

"Explain it all to me," replied Père Tabaret after a pause,—"all you understand. We, the old, are sometimes able to give good advice; and I am willing to advise you."

"Three weeks ago," commenced Noel, "searching for some old documents. I opened Madame Gerdy's secretary. Accidentally I overturned a drawer: some papers tumbled out, amongst which were a packet of

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letters, which fell right into my hand. A mechanical impulse, which I cannot explain, prompted me to untie the string, and read one of the letters."

"You did wrong," remarked Père Tabaret.

"Be it so. I read. At the end of ten lines, I was convinced that this correspondence was my father's, whose name, Madame Gerdy, in spite of my prayers, had always hidden from me. You can understand my emotion. I carried off the packet, shut myself up in this room, and devoured the letters from beginning to end."

"And you have been cruelly punished, my poor boy!"

"It is true; but who in my position could have resisted? These letters have given me pain; but they afford the proof of what I have told you."

"And you have preserved the letters?"

"I have them here; and, that you may understand the case in which I have requested your advice, I am going to read them to you."

The advocate opened one of the drawers of his bureau, pressed an imperceptible spring, and a hidden receptacle appeared in the back of the upper tablette, from which he drew out a bundle of letters.

"You understand, my friend," said he, "that I shall spare you all insignificant details, which, however, have their own weight. I am only going to take up the important facts, which treat directly of the affair."

Père Tabaret nestled in his arm-chair, burning with the fever of curiosity, his face expressing the most ardent attention.

After a selection, which he was some time in making, the advocate opened a letter, and commenced his reading in a voice which trembled, in spite of his efforts to render it calm.

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"'My Valerie, well beloved,—'

"Valerie," said he, "you understand is Madame Gerdy."

"I know, I know. Do not interrupt yourself."

Noel continued.

"'My Valerie, well beloved.

"'This is a happy day. This morning I received your welcome letter. I have covered it with kisses. I have read it a hundred times; and now it has gone to join the others here upon my heart. This letter fills me with transport. You were not deceived. Heaven has blessed our loves; and we shall have a son.

"'I shall have a son, the living image of my adored Valerie! Oh! why are we parted at a time like this? Why have I not the wings of a bird, that I might fly to thee, beloved of my soul and mingle our tears of joy and thankfulness? Ah! never as at this moment have I cursed the fatal union imposed upon me by an inexorable family, whose cruelty my prayers and tears could not soften. I cannot restrain myself from hating this woman who bears in spite of me my name, innocent victim though she is of the barbarity of our parents. And, to fill up the measure of sorrow, she is also soon to make me a father. What words can paint my sorrow when I compare the fortunes of these two children?

"'One, son of the object of my tenderest love, shall have neither father, family, nor name, since an inexorable law forbids me to legitimatize him. While the other, the son of my detested spouse, by the sole fact of his birth shall be rich, honored, noble, surrounded by devotion and homage, with a great position in the world. I cannot endure the thought of this terrible injustice! Who can imagine a way to repair it? I cannot tell now; but be sure I shall find a way. It is to him, the most desired, most cherished, most beloved, that the best fortune should come; and come to him it shall: I swear it.'"

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"From whence is that letter dated?" demanded Père Tabaret.

"See," replied Noel.

He handed the letter to the old fellow, who read,—

"Venice, December, 1828."

"You perceive," said the advocate, "all the importance of this first letter: it is a brief statement of the facts. My father, married in spite of himself, adores his mistress and detests his wife. Nor are his feelings towards the infants at all concealed. In fact, we can plainly perceive, peeping forth, the germ of the idea which afterwards he matured and carried into execution, in defiance of all law human or divine!"

He was gradually falling into his professional manner, as if pleading the cause before the tribunals. Père Tabaret again interrupted him.

"There is no explanation necessary; the letter is explicit enough. I am not an adept in such matters as a grand juror; but I understand admirably so far."

"I pass several letters," continued Noel, "and I come to this one of Jan. 23, 1829. It is very long, and filled with matters altogether foreign to the subject which now interests us. However, I find therein two passages, which attest the slow but steady and determinate growth of the idea suggested in the first letter.

"'The destinies, more powerful than my will, chain me here; but my soul is ever near to thee, my adored Valerie! Without ceasing, my thoughts rest upon the unspeakable happiness in store for us.'

"I skip," said Noel, "several pages of passionate rhapsody, to stop at these lines at the end.

"'My aversion to the countess increases daily. Unfortunate woman! I hate and at the same time pity her. She seems to divine the occasion of my sadness, my

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coldness. By her timid submission and unalterable sweetness, she seems to seek pardon for her share in our unhappy union. Sacrificed creature! She also may have given her heart to another, before being fettered to a husband who can never look upon her with a husband's love. Your good heart will pardon me this pity.'

"That countess was my mother," cried the advocate in a trembling voice. "And he demands pardon for the pity she inspires! Poor lady!"

He covered his eyes with his hand, as if forcing back his tears, and added in a low tone,—

"She is dead!"

In spite of his impatience, Père Tabaret dared not utter a word. He resented keenly the profound sorrow of his youthful and respected friend. After a silence, which almost maddened the old fellow, Noel raised his head, and returned to the letters.

"All the letters which follow," said he, "carry traces of the preoccupation of my father's mind on the subject of his illegitimate son. I lay them, however, aside, and take up this written from Rome, March 5, 1829."

"'My son,—our son, my most constant, my only care,—how to secure for him the position in the future of which I dream? The nobles of former days had not these vulgar obstacles to their wishes to contend with. In old time, a word from the king would have ennobled my son, and given him a place in the world. To-day, the king who governs with difficulty his disaffected subjects, can do less than nothing. Nobility has lost its rights, and the lords of France are as powerless to transgress the laws as the meanest of their vassals.'

"Lower down I find,—

"'My heart loves to picture to itself the form and features of our son. He will have the soul, the mind,

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the beauty, all the fascinations of his mother. He will inherit from his father the pride, the valor, the sentiments of his noble and ancient race. What will be the other? I tremble to think of it.'

"The monster! that is I!" cried the advocate with intense rage. "'Whilst the other—' but let us leave this part of the subject, these preliminaries to an outrageous action. I only desire by these to show the abberation of my father's reason under the influence of his passion. We shall soon be at the end."

Père Tabaret was astonished at the strength of this passion, long since burnt out, of which Noel was raking up the dead ashes. Perhaps he felt all the more keenly the force of those passionate expressions of devotion, because they reminded him of his own lost youth. He understood how irresistible must have been the force of such a love; and he trembled to speculate as to the result.

"Here," said Noel, "is another; not one of those interminable epistles from which I have read you fragments, but a simple billet. It is dated from Venice at the beginning of May; it is short and decisive.

"'DEAR VALERIE,—

"'Thy response is more favorable than I dared to hope for. The project I have conceived is now practicable. I begin to feel the approach of calmness and security. Your son shall bear my name. I shall not be obliged to separate myself from him. He shall be reared near me, in my house, under my eyes, on my knees, in my arms. Shall I have strength to bear this excess of happiness?

"'I set out to-morrow for Naples, from whence I shall write to you at length; although, whatever may happen, though I should sacrifice the important interests confided to me, I shall be in Paris at the solemn

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hour. My presence will double your courage; my love shall diminish thy sufferings.' "

" Pardon me for interrupting you, Noel," said Père Tabaret, " do you know what grave affairs detained your father abroad?"

" My father, my old friend," replied the advocate, " was, in spite of his youth, one of the friends, one of the confidants, of Charles X.; and he had been charged by him with a secret mission to Italy. My father is the Count Rheteau de Commarin." →

" Whew!" exclaimed the old fellow; and between his teeth, the better to engrave the name upon his memory, he repeated several times, " Rheteau de Commarin."

Noel held his peace. Having controlled his resentment, he seemed buried in reflection, as if seeking the means of executing his unalterable determination to repair the wrong he had sustained.

" In the middle of the month of May," continued he, " my father writes again, this time from Naples. Does it not appear incredible that a man of prudence, sense, a dignified diplomatist, a gentleman, should dare, even in the eagerness of insensate passion, to confide to paper this most monstrous project? Listen!

" ' My Adored,—

" ' Germain, my faithful *valet de chambre*, will hand you this letter. I have despatched him to Normandy, charged with a commission of the most delicate nature. He is one of those servitors who may be trusted implicitly.

" ' The time has come when you must learn the nature of my project touching our son. In three weeks, at the latest I shall be in Paris.

" ' Here is what I have resolved.

" ' The two infants will be entrusted to two nurses

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of Normandy, where my estates are situated. One of these women, selected and instructed by Germain, will be in our interests; to her charge, my Valerie, our child is to be confided. These two women shall leave Paris the same day, Germain accompanying her who has the son of the countess.

"'An accident, arranged in advance, will compel these two women to pass one night on the road. Another chance, brought about by Germain, will force them to sleep in the same inn,—in the same chamber!

"'During the night, the nurse entrusted with your child will change the infants in their cradles.

"'I have foreseen and arranged every thing, even as I now explain it to you. Every precaution has been taken to prevent our secret from escaping. Germain is charged to procure, while in Paris, a cradle and clothing for your infant precisely similar to that of the countess's. Assist him with your advice.

"'Your maternal heart, sweet Valerie, may bleed at thought of being deprived of your infant. Console yourself for the loss of his innocent caresses, by dreaming of the station secured to him by your sacrifice. What excess of maternal tenderness can serve him as powerfully as this separation? As to the other, I know your tenderness of heart. You will love him for his father's sake; and the affection you bestow on him will prove your devotion to me. And he will have nothing to complain of. Knowing nothing, he shall have nothing to regret; and all that money and influence can secure, in his position, he shall have.

"'Do not argue with me that this attempt is criminal. No, my well beloved, no. The success of our plan depends upon so many coincidences, independent of our will, that should they unite, we may assure ourselves the hand of Providence favors our design. If success crowns our wishes, it will be because heaven has decreed it.

"'I have hope!'"

"Just what I thought," murmured Père Tabaret.

"And the wretched man," cried Noel, "dares to in-

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voke the aid of Providence! He would make heaven his accomplice!"

"But your mother," demanded the old fellow,—"pardon, I would say Madame Gerdy,—how did she receive this proposition?"

"She would appear to have rejected it, at first, for here are twenty pages of eloquent persuasion from the count, urging her to agree to it. Oh, this woman!"

"My son," said Père Tabaret, softly, "let us not be unjust. Why direct all your resentment against Madame Gerdy? To me, the count seems far more deserving of your anger."

"True," interrupted Noel, with a certain degree of violence,—"true, the count is culpable. He is the author of an infamous conspiracy; yet I am not inspired by a sense of hatred against him. He has committed a crime, but has passion to excuse it. Moreover, he has not deceived me every hour of my life, by enacting a lie, as this miserable woman has, for thirty years. And, more than all, his punishment has been so cruel, that I can even now pardon the injury he has done me, and weep for the suffering it has entailed."

"Ah! he has been punished?" interrogated the old fellow.

"Yes, fearfully; how you shall learn. But allow me to continue. Towards the end of May, or more probably, during the first days of June, the count must have arrived in Paris; for the correspondence ceases. It would seem, that, after his meeting with Madame Gerdy, the final arrangements of the conspiracy were delayed by some obstacle. Here is a billet, relieving all uncertainty on the subject. On the day it was written, the count was on service at the Tuileries, and unable to leave his post. He has written it even in the king's cabi-

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net, on the king's paper; see the royal arms! The bargain has been concluded; the woman who has consented to become the instrument of his project, is in Paris, of which he acquaints his mistress.

"'DEAR VALERIE,—

"'Germain announces to me the arrival of your son's nurse,—your son, *our* son. She will present herself at your house during the day. She is to be depended upon. A magnificent recompense is the price of her discretion. She has been given to understand that you are ignorant of the proposed exchange of children; therefore say nothing to her that may undeceive her on that point. I wish to charge myself with the sole responsibility of the deed. It is the most prudent course. This woman is of Normandy. She was born on our lands and in some sort in our house. Her husband is an honest mariner. Her name is Claudine Lerouge.

"'Be of good courage, my love! I am exacting from you the greatest sacrifice that can be made by woman; and I appreciate the devotion that foregoes a mother's happiness for thy lover's sake. There is no longer a doubt that heaven is protecting us. All smiles. Hereafter everything depends upon our address, our prudence. I feel that we shall succeed!'"

On one point, at least Père Tabaret was sufficiently enlightened. The researches into the past life of the Widow Lerouge were anticipated. He could not restrain an exclamation, "At last!" of satisfaction, which fortunately escaped Noel.

"This note," said the advocate, "closes the Count de Commarin's correspondence."

"What!" exclaimed the old fellow, "you are in possession of nothing more?"

"I have yet ten lines, written many years later, which certainly have some weight, but after all offer only moral proof."

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"What a misfortune!" murmured Père Tabaret. Noel replaced on his bureau the letters which were in his hand, and turning towards his old friend, looked at him steadily.

"Suppose," he said slowly, and emphasizing every syllable,—"suppose that all my sources of information end here. Admit, for a moment, that I know nothing more than you do now. What is your advice?"

Père Tabaret paused some minutes before answering; he was weighing the probabilities resulting from the count's letters.

"For my own part," said he at length, "I believe on my soul you are not the son of Madame Gerdy."

"And you believe rightly!" answered the advocate forcibly. "You think, do you not, that, after reading these letters, I ought to have seen and questioned Claudine? You will say this poor woman who nursed me must have loved me; that she must have suffered some remorse for her part in the horrible injustice of which I was the victim? Well, I have seen her. I have questioned her; and she has confessed all. She was only too glad to do so. The thought of her complicity tormented her. It was a weight of guilt too heavy for her age to bear; and she told me all. The count's scheme, simply and yet ingeniously conceived, succeeded without any effort; and I, poor helpless infant! when but three days old was thus betrayed, despoiled, and disinherited by my unnatural father and his unworthy mistress. Poor Claudine! remorse was dragging her to the grave; and she promised me, with eagerness, her testimony on the day I should reclaim my rights."

"And she has gone, carrying her secret with her," murmured the old fellow in a tone of regret.

"I have yet," said Noel, "one hope. Claudine had

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in her possession several letters, written subsequently, —some by the Count, some by Madame Gerdy,—letters at once imprudent and explicit. They can be, without question, recovered; and their evidence will be decisive. I have had them in my hands: I have read them. Claudine would have given them to me; but, fool that I was, I did not take them."

The little hope that existed in that quarter no one knew better than Père Tabaret. To gain possession of those very letters, the crime at Jonchère had been committed. The assassin had found and burned them, with the other papers, in the little stove. The old amateur was master of the situation.

"Knowing your affairs, my dear boy, almost as thoroughly as my own," said the old fellow after another pause, "I am surprised the count should have forgotten the promises he made in his letters to Madame Gerdy, of promoting your fortune."

"He seems never to have remembered them, my old friend."

"That," cried the old fellow indignantly, "is even more infamous than all the rest!"

"Do not accuse my father," answered Noel gravely; "his *liaison* with Madame Gerdy ceased long ago. I have a faint recollection of a distinguished looking man who came to see me at school. I am now persuaded it was the count. But the rupture came."

"Naturally," said Père Tabaret. "A fine gentleman!"

"Suspend your judgment," interrupted the advocate. "M. de Commarin had good reason; his mistress deceived him. He discovered her perfidy, and cast her off with just indignation. The ten lines of which I have spoken were written then."

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Noel searched a considerable time among the papers scattered upon the table, and at length selected a letter more faded and creased than the others. Judging from its appearance of having been often folded and unfolded, it had been read over and over many times; the writing was almost effaced in many places.

"In this," said he in a bitter tone, "Madame Gerdy is no longer 'adored Valerie.'"

"'A cruel friend has, like a true friend, opened my eyes. I doubted him, believing in you: but you have been watched; and to-day, unhappily, I can doubt no more. You, Valerie,—you to whom I have given more than my life,—you have deceived me, and have been deceiving me long. Unhappy man that I am, I can no longer be certain that I am the father of your child.'"

"But this letter is a proof," cried Père Tabaret,—"a proof that cannot be overcome. Of what importance to the count would be a doubt of his paternity, had he not sacrificed his legitimate to his natural son? Yes, you have said truly, my dear Noel, his chastisement has been severe."

"Madame Gerdy," continued Noel, "attempted to justify herself. She wrote to the count; but he returned her letters unopened. She tried to see him, but in vain: he would not grant her an interview. She knew that all was over when the count's steward brought her a legal settlement of fifteen thousand francs a year. Her son had taken my place; and his mother had ruined me!"

A light knock at the door of the study interrupted their conversation.

"Who is there?" demanded Noel without stirring.

"Monsieur," answered the servant from outside the door, "madame wishes to speak to you."

The advocate appeared to hesitate.

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"Go, my son," advised Père Tabaret; "do not be merciless."

Noel arose with visible reluctance, and passed into Madame Gerdy's sleeping apartment.

"Poor boy!" thought Père Tabaret when left alone. "What a fatal discovery! and how he must feel it. Noble young man! Brave, honest heart! In his innocent simplicity, he sees not from whence the blow has fallen. By good fortune, I am not so blind. I can see for him; and, when he despairs of justice, I am confident of obtaining it. Thanks to his information, I can see it all now. An infant's intelligence might now divine whose hand struck the blow that silenced the important witness. How singular that he should assist the discovery of this crime without knowing it! How shall I proceed? Ah! if I could have one of those letters for four and twenty hours. He probably has counted them. I dare not ask for one; I would be compelled to acknowledge my connection with the police. Better run the risk, and take one, no matter which, that I may verify the writing."

Père Tabaret had hardly thrust one of the letters into the depths of one of his capacious pockets, when the advocate returned.

He was one of those men of strongly formed character whose self-control never deserts them. He was long accustomed to dissimulation, that indispensable armor of the ambitious.

Nothing in his manner betrayed what had taken place between Madame Gerdy and himself. He was absolutely as calm as, when seated in his arm-chair, he listened to the interminable nothings of his clients.

"Well," demanded Père Tabaret, "how is she now?"

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"Worse," answered Noel: "she is delirious. She just now assailed me with the most injurious accusations, upbraiding me as the vilest of mankind. I am persuaded she is out of her senses."

"Or losing them," murmured Père Tabaret; "and I think you ought to call in a physician."

"I am going in search of one," answered Noel.

The advocate resumed his seat before his bureau, and re-arranged, according to their dates, the scattered letters. He seemed to have forgotten that he was wanting advice from his old friend; nor did he appear desirous of renewing the conversation. This was the farthest in the world from Père Tabaret's intention.

"The more I ponder over your history, my dear Noel," commenced he, "the more I am bewildered. I do not know what resolution I should adopt, were I in your situation."

"Yes, my old friend," answered the advocate, "it is a situation that might well perplex more profound experiences than yours."

The amateur repressed with difficulty the smile, which for an instant appeared upon his lips.

"I confess it humbly," said he, taking pleasure in assuming an air of innocence. "But have you done any thing yet? Your first move should have been to demand an explanation of Madame Gerdy."

Noel made a startled movement, which was unnoticed by Père Tabaret, pre-occupied as he was in trying to give the turn he desired to the conversation.

"It was by that," answered Noel, "I began."

"Well, what did she say?"

"What could she say? Was she not overwhelmed by the discovery?"

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"What! did she not attempt to exculpate herself?"

"Oh, yes," sneered Noel, "she attempted; she is accustomed to attempt the impossible, of course. She pretended to explain the correspondence. She told me, I know not how many absurd falsehoods."

The advocate finished gathering up his letters, without seeming to perceive the abstraction, tied them carefully, and replaced them in the secret drawer.

"Yes," continued he, rising and shutting up his bureau, as if trying by the movement to calm his anger, —"yes, she attempted to make me believe the exchange had never taken place,—no easy matter, considering the proofs I hold. This is the occasion of her sickness. The idea that her son, whom she adores, should be obliged to restore to me the name and fortune of which he robbed me broke her heart. She could see me suffer the most cruel privations; but she could not bear the thought of her son's displacement. Rather than I should hurt a hair of his head, she would consign me to the bottomless pit."

"She has probably acquainted the count with your discovery," said Père Tabaret, pursuing his idea.

"Hardly; for the count has been absent from Paris more than a month, and is not expected to return until the end of the week."

"How do you know that?"

"I called at the house, as I wished to see and speak with him."

"You?"

"Yes. Do you think I shall not reclaim my own? Do you imagine that I am the man to be robbed, spoiled, and betrayed with impunity? No, I have rights; and I shall make them good. What consideration withholds me from lifting up my voice and proclaiming my

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wrongs? I shall claim my rights. Do you think that surprising?"

"No, certainly, my friend; then you have visited M. de Commarin's house?"

"Oh! I did not adopt this resolution immediately," continued Noel. "My discovery made me at first almost lose my senses. A thousand opposing sentiments agitated me. At one moment, my fury blinded me; the next, my courage deserted me. I would, and I would not. I was undecided, uncertain, wild. The eclat that must be occasioned by the publicity of such an affair terrified me. I longed to recover,—I *will* recover my name; but I would at the same time preserve that noble name from stain. I would, if possible, find a means of conciliating all parties concerned, without publicity and without scandal."

"You decided?"

"Yes, after a struggle of fifteen days,—fifteen days of torture, of anguish! Ah! what I suffered in that time! I neglected my business, being unable to fix my mind upon any kind of work. During the day, I tried by incessant action to fatigue my body, that at night I might find forgetfulness in sleep. Vain hope: since I found those ill-omened letters, I have not slept an hour."

From time to time, Père Tabaret silently consulted his watch.

"M. Daburon will be asleep," thought he.

"One morning," continued Noel, "after a night of rage, I determined to end all uncertainty. I was in that desperate state of mind, in which the gambler, after successive losses, throws upon the board his last remaining coin. I called a carriage, and, with a beating heart, gave the order, 'To the Hotel de Commarin, Faubourg St. Germain.'"

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The old amateur allowed a sigh of impatience to escape him.

"It is one of the most magnificent houses in Paris," continued Noel,—"a princely dwelling, worthy the representation of an illustrious family,—almost a palace. Right and left of the vast courtyard are the stables, where twenty horses of price are standing in reserve for common use. At the back rises the grand façade of the main building, majestic and severe, with its sculptured pediment, its noble portico, and its double flight of marble steps. Behind the house extends a large garden, or rather a park, shaded by the oldest trees, perhaps, in Paris."

This enthusiastic description sorely tested Père Tabaret's patience; but he did not venture to interrupt Noel by a question. An indiscreet word might betray him, and reveal his relation with the bureau of investigation.

"Standing before the dwelling of my ancestors," continued Noel, "you cannot comprehend the excess of my emotion. Here, said I, is the house in which I was born. This is the home in which I should have been reared; and, above all, this is the spot where I should reign to-day, whereon I stand an outcast and a stranger, devoured by the sad and bitter memories, of which banished men have died. I compared my brother's brilliant destinies with my sad and laborious career; and my indignation well nigh overmastered reason. The mad impulse stirred me to force the doors, to rush into the grand salon, and drive out the intruder,—the son of Madame Gerdy,—who has taken the place of the son of the Countess de Commarin! Out, usurper, out of this. I am the master here. The propriety of legal means at once recurred to my distracted mind however, and restrained me. Once more I stood before the habi-

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tation of my fathers. How I love its old sculptures, its grand old trees, its shaded walks, worn by the feet of my poor mother! I love all, even to the proud escutcheon, frowning above the principal doorway, flinging its defiance to the theories of this age of levellers."

This last phrase conflicted so directly with the code of opinions habitual to Noel, that Père Tabaret was obliged to turn aside, to conceal his amusement.

"Poor humanity!" thought he; "he is already the grand seigneur."

"On presenting myself," continued the advocate, "I demanded to see the Count de Commarin. A Swiss porter, in grand livery, answered, the count was traveling, but that the viscount was at home. This ran counter to my designs; but I was embarked; so I insisted on speaking to the son in default of the father. The Swiss porter stared at me with astonishment. He had evidently seen me alight from a hired carriage, and so deliberated for some moments as to whether I was not too insignificant a person to have the honor of being admitted to visit the viscount."

"But tell me, have you seen him?" asked Père Tabaret, unable to restrain his impatience.

"Of course, immediately," replied the advocate in a tone of bitter raillery. "Could the examination, think you, result otherwise than in my favor? No. My white cravat and black costume produced their natural effect. The Swiss porter entrusted me to the guidance of a chasseur with a plumed hat, who, leading me across the court to a superb vestibule, transferred me to the care of a lackey; who, in company with five or six others, was lolling upon a bench. This fine gentleman led me up a spacious staircase, wide enough for a carriage to ascend, and preceded me along an extensive

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picture gallery, guided me across a vast apartment, of which the furniture was shrouded in sombre coverings, and finally delivered me into the hands of the *valet de chambre* of Albert de Commarin; that is to say, the man who bears my name."

"I understand, I understand."

"I had passed an inspection; now I had to undergo an examination. M. Albert's valet desired to be informed who I was, whence I came, and what I wanted, what was my profession, and all the rest. I answered simply, that I was unknown to the viscount; but it was absolutely necessary I should converse with him for five minutes upon an affair of the most urgent nature. I waited more than a quarter of an hour, when he reappeared. His master had graciously deigned to receive me."

It was easy to perceive that his reception rankled in the advocate's breast. He could not forgive Albert his lackeys and his *valet de chambre*. He forgot the words of the illustrious duke, who said, "I pay my valets for being insolent, to save myself the trouble." Père Tabaret was a little surprised at his young friend's bitterness, in speaking of these trivial details.

"Can it be true," thought he, "that the arrogance of lackeys is the secret of the people's hatred of the aristocracy?"

"I was ushered into a small salon," continued Noel, "simply furnished, the only ornaments of which were weapons. These, ranged against the walls, were of all times and countries. Never have I seen in so small a space so many muskets, arquebusses, pistols, swords, sabres, and foils: one might have imagined himself in the arsenal of a *maitre de armes*."

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The weapon used by the Widow Lerouge's assassin naturally recurred to the old fellow's memory.

"The viscount," continued Noel, speaking slowly, "was half lying on the divan when I entered. He was dressed in a jacket and pantaloons of velvet, and had around his neck an immense scarf of white silk. I do not cherish resentment against this young man. He has never to his knowledge injured me. He had no share in his parent's crime. I am therefore able to speak of him with justice. He is handsome, has a noble air, and carries gracefully the name which does not belong to him. He is about my height, of the same brown complexion, and would resemble me, perhaps, if he did not wear a beard. Yet he appears at least five years younger; but this is readily explained, he has neither worked nor suffered. He is one of the fortunate ones of the earth, who traverse life's road on such soft cushions that they are never injured by the jolting of the carriage. On seeing me, he arose and saluted me graciously."

"You must have been dreadfully excited."

"Less than I am at this moment: remember, I was fifteen days preparing for this interview; and fifteen days of mental torture exhausts one's emotions. I answered the question I saw upon his lips. 'Monsieur,' said I, 'you do not know me; but that is of little consequence. I come to you, charged with a very grave, a very sad mission, which not only interests you, but touches the honor of the name you bear.' Without doubt he did not believe me; for, in a tone of the coolest impertinence, he asked me, 'Shall you be long?' I answered as coolly, 'Yes.'"

"Pray," said Père Tabaret, becoming very attentive,

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" do not omit a single detail; it may be very important, you understand."

" The viscount," continued Noel, " appeared much disquieted. At length he said courteously, ' My time is hardly at my own disposal this morning. I am at this hour engaged to call upon my fiancée, Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Can we not postpone this conversation?' "

" Good! another woman," said the old fellow to himself.

" I answered the viscount, that an explanation would admit of no delay; and, as I saw him prepare to dismiss me, I drew from my pocket the count's correspondence, and presented to him one of the letters. On recognizing his father's handwriting, he became more tractable, declared himself at my service, and demanded permission to write a word of apology to the lady by whom he was expected. Having written the note hastily, he handed it to his valet, and ordered him to send it to Mademoiselle d'Arlanges immediately; then, opening the door of the adjoining apartment, his library, he requested me to enter."

" One word," interrupted the old fellow; " was he troubled on seeing the letters?"

" Not the least in the world. After closing the door, he handed me a chair, and, seating himself, said, ' Now, monsieur, explain yourself.' I was fully prepared for the situation, and decided to strike a grand *coup*.

" ' Monsieur,' said I, ' my mission is painful. The facts I am about to reveal to you are incredible. I beseech you, do not interrupt me, and do not answer me until you have read the letters I am about to show you.' He regarded me with an air of extreme surprise, and answered, ' Speak! I can hear all.' I stood up. ' Monsieur,' said I, ' I must inform you that you are

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not the legitimate son of M. de Commarin, as this correspondence will prove to you. The legitimate son exists; and he it is who sends me.' I kept my eyes on his while speaking; and I saw there a passing gleam of fury: for a moment I expected he was about to spring at my throat. He spoke quickly. 'The letters,' said he in a short tone. I handed them to him."

"How," cried Père Tabaret, "these letters—the true ones? How imprudent!"

"And why?"

"If he had—I don't know; but—" the old fellow hesitated. The advocate leaned his powerful hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"I was there," said he in a hollow tone; "and I promise you the letters were in no danger."

Noel's features assumed such a sudden expression of ferocity that the old fellow was terrified, and recoiled instinctively.

"He would have killed him," thought he.

The advocate resumed.

"That which I have done for you this evening, my friend, I did for the viscount. I obviated, at least for the moment the necessity of reading all of these hundred and fifty-six letters, by directing his attention to those marked with a cross, and to the passages of most especial importance, indicated with a red pencil."

"It was an abridgement of his penance," said Père Tabaret.

"He was seated," continued Noel, "before a little table, too fragile even to lean upon. I was resting against the mantelpiece. I followed his slightest movements; and I scanned his features closely. Never in my life have I seen so sad a spectacle. I shall never forget it, were I to live a thousand years. In less than five min-

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utes his face changed to a degree that his own valet would not have recognized him. He held his handkerchief in his hand, with which from time to time mechanically he wiped his lips; and, as he read, the lips became as white as the handkerchief. Large drops of sweat stood upon his forehead; and his eyes became dull and clouded, as if a film had covered them: but not an exclamation, not a sign, not a groan, escaped him, not even a gesture. At one moment, I felt such pity for him that I was almost on the point of snatching the letters from his hands, throwing them into the fire, and taking him in my arms, crying, 'No, you are my brother! Forget all; let us remain each one in his place! Let us love one another.'"

Père Tabaret took Noel's hand, and pressed it.

"Ah!" cried he, "I recognize my generous boy."

"If I have not done this, my friend, it is because I said to myself, 'These letters burned, would he recognize me as his brother?'"

"Ay!" sighed Père Tabaret, "it is true."

"In about half an hour, he had finished reading: he arose, and facing me directly, said, 'You are right, monsieur. If these letters are really written by my father, as I believe them to be, they distinctly prove that I am not the son of the Countess de Commarin.' I did not answer. 'Meanwhile,' continued he, 'these are only presumptions. Are you possessed of other proofs?' I expected, of course, a great many other objections. 'Germain,' said I, 'can speak.' He told me that Germain had been dead for several years. Then I spoke of the nurse, the Widow Lerouge. I explained how easily she could be found and questioned, adding that she lived at la Jonchère."

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"And what said he, Noel, to this?" demanded Père Tabaret anxiously.

"He preserved a moment's silence, and appeared to reflect. All on a sudden he struck his forehead, and said, 'I remember; I know her. I have accompanied my father to her house three times, and have seen him give her considerable sums of money.'"

"I remarked to him that this was yet another proof. He made no answer, but went out as if to look for something in the adjoining room. He returned after some minutes,—

"'Monsieur, said he, can I meet the legitimate son of the count, my father?' I answered, 'You see him before you, monsieur!' He bowed his head, and murmured, 'I knew it was he.' He took my hand, and added, 'Brother, I bear you no grudge for the step you have taken. All I ask of you is, to wait eight or ten days, when my father will return. I will explain every thing to him; and I promise you that justice shall be done. I, on my side, lose everything,—name, position, fortune, and, worse than all, I shall probably lose my plighted bride, Mademoiselle d'Arlanges, who is dearer to me than life itself. In exchange, it is true I shall find a mother. I will labor to console her for your loss, monsieur, and win her love by tenderness and devotion.'"

"Did he really say that?"

"Almost word for word."

"Hypocrite!" growled the old fellow between his teeth.

"What did you say?" asked Noel.

"I say that he is a fine young man; and I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance."

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"I did not show him the letter referring to the rupture," added Noel; "so that he is ignorant of Madame Gerdy's misconduct. I voluntarily deprived myself of this proof, rather than give him further pain."

"And now?"

"What am I to do? I am waiting the count's return. I shall act more freely after hearing what he has to say. To-morrow I shall demand permission from the tribunals to examine the papers belonging to Claudine. If I find the letters, I am saved; if not,—but, as I have told you, I have taken no step since I knew of this assassination. Now, what is your advice?"

"The briefest counsel demands long reflection," replied the old fellow, who was in haste to depart. "Alas! my poor boy, what a fate yours has been!"

"Terrible! and, in addition to all this distraction, I have pecuniary embarrassments."

"How! you who spend nothing?"

"I have advanced large sums on mortgages. I might make use of Madame Gerdy's fortune, which I have hitherto used as my own; but no, I could not bring myself to it."

"You certainly ought not; but hold! I am glad you spoke of money: you can render me a service."

"Very willingly; in what way?"

"I have in my secretary twelve or fifteen thousand francs, which trouble me exceedingly, you can easily understand why. I am an old man, weak and defenceless. If any one knew I had this money—"

"You are certainly imprudent in running such a risk," acknowledged the advocate.

"Then," said the old fellow, "to-morrow I will give them to you to take care of."

But remembering he was about to put himself at M.

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Daburon's disposal, and that perhaps he might not be free on the morrow, he said,—

"But no, I will not wait until to-morrow. This infernal money shall not remain another night in my keeping."

He darted out, and presently reappeared, holding in his hand fifteen bank bills of a thousand francs each.

"If that is not sufficient for the present," said he, handing them to Noel, "you can have more."

"I will give you a receipt," said the advocate.

"Time enough to-morrow."

"And if I die to-night?"

"Then," said the old fellow to himself, thinking of his will, "some one else will have to be my heir. Good-night!" said he aloud: "you have asked my advice; I shall require the night for reflection. At present my brain is whirling; I must go out into the air. If I go to bed now, I shall have a horrible nightmare. Good-night, my boy; patience and courage. Who knows whether at this very hour Providence is not working for you?"

He went out; and Noel, leaving his door open, listened to the sound of his footsteps as he descended the stairs. Almost immediately the cry of, "Open, if you please," and the banging of the door apprised him that Père Tabaret was in the street.

He waited a few minutes and refilled his lamp, then took a small packet from one of his bureau drawers, slipped into his pockets the bank bills given him by his old friend, and quitted his study, of which he locked the door. On the landing of the staircase he paused. He listened so intently that even Madame Gerdy's moans were audible to him. Hearing nothing else, he descended on tiptoe. A minute later he was in the street.

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CHAPTER V.

COMMUNICATING with Madame Gerdy's apartments was a room on the ground floor, formerly a coach house, but used by her as a lumber room. Here were heaped together all the old rubbish of the household,—utensils past service, articles become useless or cumbrous. Here were also stored the provision of wood and coal for winter fuel.

This old coach house had a small door opening on the street, which had been nailed up many years ago; but Noel had secretly repaired this door, provided it with a lock, of which he kept the key, and by its means was enabled to enter or leave the house at any hour, without the porter's knowledge.

By this door the advocate went out, using the utmost caution in opening and closing it.

When in the street, he remained a moment stationary, as if hesitating which way to go. Then, turning his steps towards the railway depot of St. Lazare, he hailed a passing cab.

"Rue Faubourg Montmarte, at the corner of the Rue Provence, and make haste," said Noel, entering the vehicle.

At the spot named, the advocate alighted, and dismissed his coachman. Waiting until he had departed, Noel turned into the Rue Provence, and, after walking a few steps. rang the door-bell of one of the handsomest houses in the street.

The door was immediately opened.

When Noel passed before the *loge*, the porter made him a bow, at once respectful and patronizing,—one of

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those salutations which Parisian porters reserve for patrons of open hands and well-filled purses.

Arrived at the second floor, the advocate paused, drew a key from his pocket, and entered as if at home.

At the sound of the key in the lock, a young and pretty waiting woman, with a bold pair of eyes, ran towards him.

"Ah, monsieur!" cried she.

This exclamation escaped her just loud enough to be audible at the extremity of the apartment, and serve as a signal, if needed. It was as if she cried, "Take care!" Noel did not seem to remark it.

"Madame is there?" asked he.

"Yes, monsieur, and very angry, too, I can tell you. This morning she wanted me to go in search of you. A little while ago, she spoke of going herself. I have had much difficulty, monsieur, in not disobeying your orders."

"Very well," said the advocate.

"Madame is in the smoking room," continued the soubrette. "I am making her a cup of tea. Will monsieur have one?"

"Yes," replied Noel, "light me, Charlotte."

They passed through successively a magnificent dining room, a splendid *salon dorè* in the style of Louis the XIV., and entered the smoking room.

This was a rather large apartment, of which the ceiling was remarkably elevated. On entering it, the visitor might easily imagine himself three thousand miles from Paris, in the house of some opulent mandarin of the celestial empire of China. Furniture, carpets, hangings, pictures,—all had evidently been imported direct from Hongkong or Shanghai.

A rick silk tapestry, representing highly colored fig-

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ures, clothed the walls and hung before the doors. All the empire of the sun and moon there defiled before the spectator. Corpulent mandarins, disported themselves in vermilion landscapes, or, surrounded by lanterns, lay stupefied with opium, sleeping under their parasols. Young girls, with almond shaped eyes elevated at the outer corners, stumbled upon their diminutive feet, swathed in bandalettes.

The carpet of a tissue, the secret of which is unknown in Europe, was strewn with fruits and flowers, whose perfect resemblance to natural objects might have deceived a bee. On the silken canopy, which hid the ceiling, some great artist of Pekin had painted fantastic birds, opening on a ground of azure their wings of purple and of gold.

Slender rods of lacquer, encrusted with mother of pearl, held the draperies in place, and marked the angles of the apartment.

Two fantastic chests occupied one side of the room. Furniture of capricious and incoherent forms, tables with porcelain tops, and chiffoniers of precious woods encumbered every recess or angle.

Then there were ornamental nic-nacs, purchased in the bazars of Lien Tsi, le Tahan, from Sou-Tcheou, the artistic city,—a thousand curiosities impossible and expensive, from the ivory chop stick, which take the place of our forks, to the tea-cups of porcelain, thinner than soap bubbles,—miracles of the reign of Kien Loung.

A divan, very large and very low, piled up with cushions covered with tapestry similar to the hangings, ran along the back of the room. There was no window; but instead a large looking-glass, reaching from floor to ceiling, was let into the wall, in front of which was a double door of glass with movable panes. The space

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between this glass door and the mirror was filled with plants and rare exotics; which, being reflected in the mirror, presented the optical illusion of a conservatory.

The absent fireplace and chimney was replaced by registers adroitly concealed, which maintained a temperature in the apartment that seemed to make the flowers blow upon the silk, truly harmonizing with the furnishing of this luxurious abode.

When Noel entered, a young woman was lying on the divan, smoking a cigarette. In spite of the tropical heat, she was enveloped in great shawls of magnificent cashmere.

She was petite, and united in her small figure all the physical beauties in such perfection as only small women can. Women who are above the medium height are either essays, or errors of nature. If handsome, they invariably present some defect; like the work of a sculptor, whose faults, unnoticed when presented in a statuette, become glaring when exhibited in a colossal figure.

She was small; but her neck, her shoulders, and her arms had the most exquisite contours. Her hands, small and plump, even to the retroussé finger tips and rosy nails, were of marvellous beauty, and seemed preciously cared for. Her feet, encased in silken stockings almost as thin as a cobweb, were a marvel; not that they recalled the fabled foot which Cinderella thrust into the glassy slipper; but that other foot,—more real, more palpable, though less celebrated,—of which the fair owner (the wife of a well-known banker) used to present the model to her admirers in bronze or in marble.

Her face was not beautiful, nor even pretty: but her features were such as one never forgets; for, at the first

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glance, they startled the beholder like a flash of lightning. Her forehead was a little high, and her mouth unmistakably large, notwithstanding the provoking freshness of her lips. Her eyebrows seemed to have been drawn with Chinese ink; but, unhappily the pencil had been used too heavily; and they gave her an unpleasant expression when she frowned. In revenge for these defects, her smooth complexion had a rich golden pallor; and her black and velvety eyes possessed enormous magnetic power. Her teeth were sound and of a pearly brilliancy and whiteness; and her hair, of prodigious opulence, was black and waving, and glossy as a raven's wing.

On perceiving Noel, as he drew aside the silken curtain which served as a door, she half-arose and leaned upon her elbow.

"So you have come at last?" said she in a tone of vexation: "we ought to be very happy!"

The advocate was almost suffocated by the oppressive temperature of the room.

"How warm it is!" said he; "it is enough to stifle one!"

"Do you find it warm?" replied the young woman. "Well, that shows the extent of my suffering! I am shivering: but it's your fault; you know that waiting is insupportable to me. It acts upon my nerves; and I have waited for you since yesterday."

"It has been impossible for me to come," said Noel,—"impossible!"

"You know perfectly well," continued the lady, "that to-day was my settling day; and I have had quite a number of bills to pay. The upholsterer came. Not a sou to give him. The coachmaker sent his bill. No money: call again! then this old swindler who holds my

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note for three thousand francs,—he has been here, making a frightful row! All this is agreeable, is it not?"

Noel bowed his head like a truant school-boy, undergoing the pedagogue's rebuke.

"It is but one day behind," murmured he.

"One day behind!" retorted the young woman; "and is that nothing? A man who respects himself may permit his own note to be protested, if he will; but that of his mistress, never!"

"For what do you take me?" continued she, working herself into a passion. "Do you forget that I receive no consideration from you except money? Very well, since I am to have nothing else, I will have that at all events; and the day it is not forthcoming, I bid you good-by."

"My dear Juliette!—" began the advocate, gently.

"Oh, yes! that's all very fine; but I have heard it all before," interrupted she. "Your dear Juliette! your adored Juliette! and, as long as you are face to face with Juliette, she is an angel, if she would allow you to make a fool of her: but, no sooner have you turned your back upon Juliette, than she is given to the winds; and you never take the trouble even to remember that there *is* such a person as Juliette!"

"How unjust you are!" replied Noel. "As if you are not well assured that I am always thinking of you. Have I not proved it to you a thousand times? Hold! I am going to prove it to you again this instant."

So saying, he produced the small packet he had taken from his bureau, and, opening it, showed her a handsome velvet casket.

"See!" said he, exultingly, "the bracelet you wished for so much, eight days ago, at M. Beaugrau's."

Madame Juliette, without rising, held out her hand to take the jewel case, and, opening it with the utmost

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nonchalance, glanced at the magnificent bauble; then, closing the casket, she threw it carelessly upon a little table near her, saying, —

"It looked much prettier in the shop window."

"I am unfortunate, this evening," said the advocate, apparently much mortified at the reception of his costly present.

"Unfortunate, my friend? Indeed, how so?"

"I see plainly the bracelet does not please you."

"Oh, yes! it is very pretty; at all events, it will complete the two dozen."

At this Noel almost lost patience: but he controlled himself; and, as she was silent, he went on,—

"You exhibit little sign of gratification."

"Oh! indeed!" cried the lady. "I am not grateful enough! I am not sufficiently profuse in my acknowledgments, to please my generous benefactor? You bring me a present, and expect instant payment. I am to fill the house with cries of joy, and throw myself upon my knees before your feet, calling you a great and magnificent seigneur!"

Noel was unable this time to restrain a gesture of impatience; which Juliette perceived plainly enough, to her great delight.

"Is that sufficient?" continued she. "Or must I call Charlotte to admire this superb monument of your generosity? Shall I run down stairs to exhibit it to the porter? shall I go into the kitchen and dazzle the eyes of my cook, and ask her if I ought not to be happy in the possession of a lover so unboundedly munificent?"

The advocate raised his shoulders like a philosopher, unable to answer the jests of a child.

"A truce to these cutting witticisms," said he. "If

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you have any complaint against me, better to say so simply and seriously."

"So be it," said Juliette, quickly, changing her manner. "Let us be serious. And, being so, let me tell you it would have been better to have forgotten the bracelet, and remembered the eight thousand francs of which I have such pressing need."

"I could not come."

"You might send; there are messengers at the street-corners."

"If I have neither brought nor sent them, my dear Juliette, it was because I did not have the amount. I have trouble enough in getting a promise of it to-morrow. If I have the sum this evening, I owe it to a chance upon which I could not have counted an hour ago; and I have brought it to you to-night, at the risk of compromising myself."

"Poor man!" said Juliette, in a tone of pity; then incredulously, "do you dare to tell me you have had difficulty in finding ten thousand francs,—you?"

"Yes," replied Noel, calmly, "I!"

The young woman looked at her lover, and burst into a fit of laughter.

"You are superb in the rôle of poor young man!" said Juliette scornfully.

"It is not a rôle," said Noel stolidly.

"What do you say?" exclaimed she; "but I see what we are coming to. This amiable confession is the preface. To-morrow you will be very much embarrassed; and the day after to-morrow you will be ruined! Avarice is the name of the complaint that afflicts you, my friend. Do you not feel a pang of remorse for all the money you have lavished upon me?"

"Selfish woman!" murmured Noel, angrily.

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"Truly," continued the lady, "I pity you, unfortunate lover! Shall I get up a subscription for you? In your place, I should issue an appeal to the benevolent."

Noel lost his temper, in spite of his resolution.

"You think it a laughing matter?" asked he bitterly. "Well, understand me, Juliette; I am at the end of my expedients. I have exhausted my resources! I am ruined!"

The eyes of the young woman brightened. She regarded her lover tenderly.

"Oh, if 'twas only true!" said she. "If I could only believe you!"

The advocate was wounded to the heart.

"She believes me," thought he; "and she is glad: she detests me."

He was deceived. Madame Juliette never loved him so well as at that moment. The idea that he had loved her to the extent of ruining himself for her, without even a reproach for her extravagance, almost transported her with joy. It was but for a moment, however. She became immediately incredulous. The expression of her eyes changed quickly.

"What a fool you must think me, to come with your romantic stories of ruin, and expect me to believe them! No, no, my friend; such men as you do not ruin themselves. It is your vain young coxcombs and your drivelling old dotards who ruin themselves for their mistresses. You are a very gay young spark; but you never lose your senses. You are very grave and prudent, and, above all, very strong."

"Not with you," murmured Noel.

"Pshaw! then leave me alone. You know well what you are about. Instead of a heart, you have a calculating

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machine. You have taken a fancy to me, and appraised me. You have said to yourself, 'I can afford to pay this passion so much;' and you hold yourself to your word. It is an investment, like any other, in which one receives a certain amount of interest agreed upon. You are capable of all the folly and extravagance in the world that does not go beyond your limit of four thousand francs a month! If it runs twenty sous over the amount fixed, you take up your heart and your hat, and carry them somewhere else."

"It is true," answered Noel, coolly. "I know how to count; and that accomplishment is very useful to me now, since it enables me to know how and where I have spent my fortune."

"Do you really know?" sneered Juliette.

"And I can tell you," continued he. "At first, you were not exacting; but the appetite came with eating. You wished for luxury; you had it; splendid furniture; I gave it: extravagant toilettes, a house in the Rue Provence, with a marble staircase in front, a carriage, a pair of English horses: I responded, I denied you nothing. You had every thing you desired. I speak not of a thousand fantasies. I include neither this Chinese cabinet nor the two dozen bracelets. The total is four hundred thousand francs!"

"Are you sure?"

"As one can be who has had that amount, and has it no longer."

"Four hundred thousand francs, just? Are there no centimes?"

"No."

"There, my dear friend, I will present you with the bills duly receipted; and you will be satisfied."

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The entrance of the waiting woman with the tea-tray interrupted this amorous duet, of which Noel had experienced more than one repetition.

Madame Juliette Chaffour was a Parisienne. She was born about 1839, in the highest apartment of a house in the Faubourg Montmarte. Her mother was a beauty of some note in her day. Her father was unknown. Her infancy was a long alternation of beatings and caresses, equally furious; and she was fed on sugar plums, sour wine, and damaged fruit: so that her stomach was as depraved as her intelligence. At twelve years old, she was meagre as a nail, and green as a June apple; and, as for her mental training, a strict moralist would have considered her a precocious little wretch, totally destitute of principle.

As she gave no promise of beauty, she was placed in a store, to study the art and mystery of selling ribbons and laces; when a wealthy and highly respectable gentleman,—an old friend of her mamma's many years ago, —accorded her his protection. This prudent old gentleman was a connoisseur, and detected the promise of charms, where others saw only indications of ugliness. He sent his protégé to a school, to receive a varnish of education. Here she learned to read and write very badly, to play the piano tolerably, and to waltz to such perfection that she turned the head of a foreign ambassador, whom her old protector brought to see her at one of his visits.

When the old gentleman came to take her from the seminary, he found she had been taken away already, by a young artist, who offered her half of every thing he possessed; that is to say, nothing. At the end of three months, she quitted the studio of her artistic admirer,

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with her entire wardrobe tied up in a cotton pocket handkerchief.

During the four years which followed, she led a precarious existence,—sometimes with little else to live upon but Hope, which never wholly abandons a young girl who knows she has good eyes. By turns she sunk to the bottom, and again rose to the surface of the stream down which she was being carried. But she was reckless and imprudent. Twice had fortune in fresh gloves come knocking at her door; and she had not the sense to seize him by the skirt of his paletot.

With the assistance of a captain of a coasting vessel, she managed to get an appearance at a small theatre, and acquitted herself adroitly enough in the trifling rôles entrusted to her; when Noel, by the merest accident, encountered her. He loved her; and she became his mistress.

The advocate did not displease her at first. She admired him for his polite manners, his distinguished air, his learning, his knowledge of the world, his contempt for all that was unworthy, and, above all, for his unalterable patience, which nothing could tire. Soon, however, she began to discover qualities to her less admirable. He was not amusing. He never made her laugh. He absolutely refused to accompany her to any of the numerous places of amusement where gaiety puts on her holiday garb and laughter reigns supreme. For absolute lack of employment, she began to squander money; and, in proportion to the gratification of her extravagant desires and the sacrifices made by her lover, her aversion to him increased.

She rendered him the most miserable of men, and treated him like a very dog; and this not from natural

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badness of disposition, but from a firm belief in the precept,—the only one ever taught her by her mamma,—that a woman is beloved in proportion to the trouble she causes and the mischief she does.

Juliette was not wicked; and she believed she had much to complain of. The dream of her life was to be loved in a way which she felt, but could scarcely have explained. She had never been to her lover more than a plaything. She understood this; and, as she was naturally proud, the idea enraged her. She dreamed of a lover who would be devoted enough to make a real sacrifice for her,—who would descend to her level, instead of attempting to raise her to his. She despaired of meeting such a man.

Noel's extravagance, instead of melting her heart, hardened it. She believed he was very rich, and actually resented his liberality as the insolence of wealth; for, strange to say, in spite of her extravagance, she cared little for money. Noel would have been an immense gainer by an outspoken frankness that would have shown her clearly his situation. He lost her love by the delicacy of his dissimulation, that left her ignorant of the sacrifices he was making for her.

Noel adored Juliette. Until the fatal day he saw her, he had been a sage, a model of prudence and integrity. This, his first and only passion, burned him up; and, from the disaster, he saved only appearances. The four walls remained standing; but the interior of the edifice was destroyed. Even heroes have their vulnerable parts. Achilles was wounded in the heel. The most artfully constructed armor has a joint somewhere. By Juliette, Noel was assailable; and her entrance made way for every thing. For her, in four years, this model young man, this advocate of the immaculate reputation, this

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austere moralist, had wasted not only his own fortune, but Madame Gerdy's also.

He loved Juliette madly, without reflection, without measure, with his eyes shut. Near her, he forgot all prudence, and became reckless of consequences. In her boudoir, he dropped his mask of habitual dissimulation, and his vices displayed themselves at ease, as his limbs in a bath.

He felt himself so powerless against her that he never essayed to struggle. She possessed him. Once or twice he had attempted to firmly oppose her caprices; but she had made him pliable as the osier. Under the dark glances of this girl, his strongest resolutions melted more quickly than snow beneath the April sun. She tortured him; but she had also the power to repay him for all,—by a word, a smile, a single tear, or a caress.

Away from the enchantress, reason returned at intervals; and, in his lucid moments, he said to himself, "She does not love me. She is amusing herself with my folly, and laughing at my infatuation." But her love had taken such deep root in his heart that he could not pluck it forth. He made himself a monster of jealousy, to torture him still more, and was constantly occupied in arguments within himself respecting her fidelity. But he never had the courage to declare his suspicions. "I should either have to leave her," thought he, "or accept every thing in the future." At the idea of a separation from her, he trembled, and felt his passion strong enough to compel him to submit to the lowest indignity. He preferred even his desolating doubts to a still more dreadful certainty.

The presence of the maid who took a considerable time in arranging the tea-table gave Noel an opportunity to recover himself. He looked at Juliette; and his anger

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took flight. Already he began to fear he had been a little cruel to her.

When Charlotte retired, he came and took a seat on the divan beside his mistress, and attempted to put his arms round her.

"Come," said he in a caressing tone, "you have been angry enough for this evening. If I have done wrong, you have punished me sufficiently. Make peace, and embrace me." She repulsed him angrily, and said in a dry tone,—

"Let me alone! How many times must I repeat, that I am suffering from nervousness this evening."

"Suffer, my love? what ails you? shall I bring the doctor?"

"There is no need. I know the nature of my malady. It is called ennui; and the doctor cannot cure me."

Noel rose with a discouraged air, and took his place at the other side of the tea-table, facing her. His resignation bespoke how habituated he had become to these rebuffs. Juliette snubbed him; but he returned always, like the poor dog who lies in wait for the instant when his caresses may not be inopportune.

"You have told me very often, during the last few months, that you feel ennui. What have I done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, why then"—?

"My life is nothing more than a long imprisonment," answered the young woman with flashing eyes. "Do you think it very amusing to be shut up here all alone until you come in, like a mute at a funeral? Look at yourself,—sad, disagreeable, restless, suspicious, devoured by a prying jealousy!"

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"Your reception of me, my dear Juliette, this evening," ventured Noel, "was enough to extinguish gaiety and freeze good humor; and, as for my jealousy, one fears where one loves."

"Thank you, monsieur. I am the occasion of your sad looks and grave speeches! Go, then, and find another woman expressly formed to suit your ideas, and, if you cannot find her, have one made to order; and, when you get her, then shut her up in a cave, and show her to yourself once a day, after dinner, with the dessert, when the champagne is on the table. That's your idea of happiness, is it?"

"I should have done better not to have come," murmured the advocate.

"Indeed! That I might remain alone here, without any thing to occupy me except a cigarette and a stupid book, that I go to sleep over? Do you call this an existence, even, never to budge out of the house?"

"It is the life of all the honest women that I know," replied the advocate, dryly.

"Then I cannot compliment them on their enjoyment. They merit all the respect they gain by being honest women, if they have no more amusement than that. Happily for me, however, I am not an honest woman; although I might as well be, housed up more closely than the wife of a Turk, with your sorrowful face for my only distraction."

"You housed up? You live in a prison, you?"

"Yes, I!" continued Juliette, with eager opposition. "Let us see. Have you ever brought one of your friends here? No. Monsieur hides me. When have you offered me your arm for a promenade? Never. Monsieur's dignity would be sullied, if he were seen in my company. I

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have a carriage. Have you entered it three times? Perhaps; but then you pulled up the blinds! I ride out alone. I promenade alone."

"Always the same refrain," interrupted Noel, his anger beginning to rise, "without ceasing these discontented complainings, as if you had yet to learn the reason why this state of things exists."

"I am not ignorant," pursued the young girl, "that you blush for me. I know, at the same time, men who carry higher crests than yours who willingly show themselves by the side of their mistresses. Monsieur trembles for the fine name of Gerdy that I am tarnishing; whilst the sons of the greatest families in France are not afraid to proclaim their preferences to all the world."

This home-thrust enraged Noel, to the great delight of Madame Chaffour.

"Enough of these recriminations!" cried he, rising. "If I hide our relations, it is because I am constrained to do so. Of what do you complain? You have unrestrained liberty; and you use it, too, and so largely that your actions altogether escape me. You accuse me of creating a vacuum around you. I bring no friends to visit you. Am I to blame for the circumstances of my position? My friends have been accustomed to see me in a home whose aspect speaks of modest competence, not unrestrained extravagance. Can I bring them here, to be astonished by your luxury, by this suite of apartments,—a monument of my folly? Would they not inquire of me, from whom have I taken the money that maintains this mad profusion?

"I may have a preference: granted; but I have no right to throw away a fortune which is not my own. The day it becomes known that my folly enables you to pursue your career of extravagance, my future pros-

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pects are destroyed. What client would confide his interests to an imbecile who permitted himself to be ruined by the woman whose toilettes are the talk of Paris? I am not a noble. I have neither an historical name to tarnish nor an immense fortune to lose. I am Noel Gerdy, advocate. My reputation is all that I possess. It is a false reputation, you will say. Be it so. Such as it is, it is necessary to me; and I will endeavor to keep it."

Juliette knew Noel by heart. She saw that she had gone far enough.

"My friend," said she, tenderly, "I do not wish to pain you. You must be indulgent. I am horribly nervous this evening."

This simple change of tone delighted the advocate, and sufficed almost to calm his anger.

"You drive me mad with your injustice," said he. "While I exhaust my imagination to find what can be agreeable to you, you are perpetually attacking my gravity; and forty-eight hours have not elapsed since we were plunged in all the extravagance of the carnival. To please you, I kept the fête of Shrove Tuesday like a student. I took you to the theatre; I put on a domino, and accompanied you to the ball at the opera, and even invited two of my friends to sup with us."

"It was very gay indeed," answered the young girl, making a wry face.

"So it seemed to me."

"Did it, indeed? Then you are not difficult to please. We went to the Vaudeville, it is true, but separately, as we always do,—I alone above, you below. At the ball, you looked the very picture of misery; and, at the supper-table, your friends were as melancholy as a pair of owls. I obeyed your orders, by affecting hardly to know you; and, by the way, although you drank like a sponge-

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I could not see that you became a whit more cheerful, even when you were drunk."

"A proof," interrupted Noel, "that we ought not to force our tastes. Let us talk of something else."

He took a few steps in the room, and looked at his watch.

"An hour gone already," said he. "My love, I must leave you."

"How, already?"

"Yes, to my great regret: my mother is dangerously sick."

He displayed, and counted on the table, the bankbills given him by Père Tabaret.

"My petite Juliette," said he, "here are not eight thousand francs, but ten thousand. You will not see me again for some days."

"You are going to leave Paris, then?"

"No; but my entire time will be absorbed by an affair of immense importance. If I succeed in my undertaking, mignonne, our future happiness is assured; and you will soon see how well I love you!"

"Oh, my dear Noel, tell me what it is."

"I cannot, now."

"Tell me, I beseech you," pleaded the young girl, hanging round his neck, raising herself upon the points of her toes to approach her lips to his. The advocate embraced her; and his resolution seemed to waver.

"No," said he, at length, "I am serious, I cannot. Of what use to awaken in you hopes that may never be realized? Now, my cherished, hear me well. Whatever may happen, understand, you must under no pretext whatever again come near my house, as you had once the imprudence to do. Do not even write to me. By disobeying, you may do me an irreparable injury. If any

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accident occurs, send for me by this old extortioner, Clergeot. I ought to have a visit from him to-morrow, or the day after; he holds notes of mine."

Juliette recoiled, menacing Noel with a mutinous gesture.

"You will not tell me any thing?" insisted she.

"Not this evening; but shortly I will tell you every thing," replied the advocate embarrassed by the piercing glances of her dark eyes.

"Always some mystery!" cried Juliette, piqued at the want of success attending her blandishments.

"This will be the last, I swear to you!"

"Noel, my good man," said the young girl in a serious tone, "you are hiding something from me: I know it; I read it in your face. For several days,—how I cannot precisely explain,—you have been completely changed."

"I swear to you, Juliette—"

"No, swear nothing; I should not believe you. Only remember, no attempt at deceiving me, I forewarn you. I am a woman to revenge myself."

The advocate evidently was ill at ease.

"The affair in question," stammered he, "can as well fail as succeed."

"Enough!" interrupted Juliette; "your will shall be obeyed. I promise that. All right, monsieur. Good-night. I am going to bed."

The door was not shut upon Noel when Charlotte was installed on the divan, near her mistress. Had the advocate been listening at the door, he would have heard Madame Juliette say,—

"What a scene! No, Charlotte, I can endure him no longer. I am afraid of him. He is capable of killing me! I can see it in his glance."

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The soubrette vainly tried to defend Noel; but her mistress did not listen. She murmured,—

"Why does he absent himself? and what is he plotting? Some mischief, I am sure. An absence of eight days! It is suspicious. Can he by any chance be going to be married? Ah! if I knew it. You weary me to death, my good Noel, with your gravity and your jealousy; and I am determined to break with you one of these fine mornings; but I cannot permit you to quit me first. I cannot allow you to get married, and dismiss me. No, no, my mysterious friend, I must have some information about your business of immense importance."

But Noel did not listen at the door. He left the house in haste, descended the Rue Provence as quickly as possible, gained the Rue St. Lazare, and entered as he had departed,—by the secret door. He had hardly reached his study, when the nurse knocked at the door.

"Monsieur," said the woman, "in the name of heaven, answer me!"

He opened the door, and said with impatience, "What is it now?"

"Monsieur," stammered the servant in tears, "this is the third time I have called, and you have not answered. Come, I implore you. I am afraid madame is dying!"

He followed the nurse to Madame Gerdy's chamber. He must have found her terribly changed; for he could not restrain a movement of terror.

The sick woman struggled painfully beneath her coverings. Her face was of a livid paleness, as though there was not a drop of blood in her veins; and her eyes, which glittered with a sombre fire, seemed covered with a film. Her hair, loose and disordered, falling over her cheeks and upon her shoulders, contributed to her wild appearance. She uttered from time to time a groan

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hardly audible, or murmured unintelligible words. At times, a fiercer pang than common forced from her a cry of anguish. She did not recognize Noel.

"You see, monsieur," said the nurse.

"Yes. Who would have believed her malady could advance so rapidly? Quick, run to Dr. Hervé! he will come immediately, when you tell him it is for me."

And he seated himself in the arm-chair, facing the sick woman.

Doctor Hervé was one of Noel's friends,—an old school-fellow, his companion of the Quartier Latin, in his student days. The doctor's history differed in nothing from that of most young men, who, without fortune, friends, or influence, enter upon the practice of the most difficult, the most hazardous of professions in Paris.

A man of remarkable courage and self-reliance, conscious of possessing superior talent, Hervé determined neither to exile himself in a country village, nor place himself under the control of some unprincipled dealer in drugs, as many of his companions were reduced to the necessity of doing, to gain a bare subsistence. "I will remain in Paris," said he to himself; "I will there become celebrated. I shall be surgeon-in-chief of the hospital, and wear the cross of the legion of honor."

To enter upon this path of thorns, leading to an arch of triumph, the future academician ran himself twenty thousand francs in debt to furnish a small office. Here, armed with a patience which nothing could fatigue, an iron resolution that nothing could subdue, he struggled and waited. Only those who have experienced it can understand what sufferings are endured by the poor, proud man. who waits in a black coat, freshly shaven, with smiling lips, while he is starving of hunger. The refinements of civilization have inaugurated punish-

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ments compared to which the torture practised on his victim by the savage Indian is mercy.

The unknown physician must begin by attending the sick beds of the poor who cannot pay him, becoming known to the mass of human beings who take advantage of the needs of their fellow-men. He is called in by a citizen of the better class, to save the expense of employing a more thriving practitioner. The sick man is profuse in promises, while he is in danger; but, when cured, he recovers the use of his faculties and forgets the doctor's fee.

After seven years of heroic perseverence, Hervé obtained at last a circle of patients who paid his fees. During this time, he had lived and paid the exorbitant interest of his debt; but he had succeeded at last. Three or four pamphlets and a prize won without much intrigue, attracted public attention to him. He became the great, the famous physician of Paris.

But he is no longer the brave young enthusiast, full of the faith and hope that attended him in his visits to the poor, whose lives he saved without other payment than their prayers. He comes now to the rich man's sick bed, stronger and more self-reliant than ever, it is true, but neither hoping for nor rejoicing in success. He had used up those feelings in the days when he had not wherewith to pay for his dinner. For his great fortune in the time to come, he had paid too dearly in the past; and now to attain success is to take a revenge. At thirty-five, he is blasé, filled with disgust at the deceptions of the world and believing in nothing. Under the appearance of universal benevolence, he conceals universal scorn. His finesse, sharpened by the grindstone of adversity, has become mischievous. And, while he sees through all disguises worn by others, he hides his pene-

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tration carefully under a mask of cheerful good-nature and jovial lightness.

But he was good, he was devout, and he loved his friends.

He arrived, hardly dressed, so great had been his haste. His first word on entering was,—

"What is the matter with him?"

Noel pressed his hand in silence, and pointed to the bed.

In less than a minute, the doctor completed his examination of the sick woman, and returned to his friend.

"What has happened to her?" demanded he shortly. "It is necessary I should know."

The advocate started at this question.

"Know what?" stammered he.

"All," answered Hervé. "This is a case of encephalite. I cannot be mistaken in the symptoms. It is an uncommon malady, and generally fatal. Even when the life of the patient is saved, the functions of the brain usually remain arrested. Who can have occasioned this? There is no local injury to the brain or its bony covering. The mischief has been caused by some violent emotion of the soul,—a shock, the intelligence of some catastrophe!"

Noel interrupted his friend by a gesture, and drew him into the embrasure of the window.

"Yes, my friend," said he in a low tone, "Madame Gerdy has experienced great mental suffering. She has been tortured by remorse for crime, and apprehension of discovery. Listen, Hervé. I will confide to your honor and our friendship a secret. Madame Gerdy is not my mother. She has despoiled me, to enrich her son with my fortune and my name. Three weeks have elapsed since my discovery of this unworthy fraud. This

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discovery was the shock you have suspected. Since then, she has been dying minute by minute."

The advocate expected some exclamations of astonishment, some questions regarding the particulars of this singular history, from his friend; but the doctor received the explanation without remark, as a simple statement, indispensable to his understanding the case.

"Three weeks," murmured he; "that explains every thing. Has she appeared to suffer much during the time?"

"She complained of violent pains in the head, dimness of sight, and a noise as of the surging of water in her ears; but do not conceal any thing from me, Hervé; is there serious danger?"

"So serious, my friend, that I am undertaking a hopeless task in attempting a cure."

"Ah! good heaven!"

"You asked for the truth, my friend; and I have had the courage to answer, because you tell me this poor woman is not your mother. Nothing short of a miracle can save her; but this miracle we may prepare for. And now to work."

CHAPTER VI.

ELEVEN o'clock was striking at the Terminus of St. Lazare, when Père Tabaret left his house, stunned and bewildered by the flood of information so unexpectedly poured upon him. Having been obliged to restrain himself while in Noel's presence, his sudden release to the freedom of speech and deportment was delightful. On gaining the street, he reeled like a drunkard when he first breathes the open air, after leaving the

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heated atmosphere of the wine shop, so intense was the effect of the sudden revelations, just made by his friend Noel.

Notwithstanding his haste to arrive at M. Daburon's, he did not take a carriage. He felt the necessity of walking. He was one of those to whose brain exercise brings clearness. As he went along, his ideas clashed and shifted themselves, as grains of wheat when shaken in a basket. Without hastening his pace, he gained the Rue Chaussèe d'Antin, crossed the boulevard with its resplendent cafés, and turned into the Rue Richelieu.

He walked along, unconscious of external objects, tripping and stumbling over the inequalities of the sidewalk, or slipping on the greasy pavement. If he followed the proper road, it was a purely mechanical impulse that guided him. His mind was following through the darkness the mysterious thread of which he had seized the almost imperceptible end at Jonchère.

Persons laboring under strong emotion frequently, without knowing it, utter their thoughts aloud, little thinking into what indiscreet ears their revelations or disjointed phrases may fall. At every step, we meet in Paris people babbling to themselves, and unconsciously confiding to the four winds of heaven their dearest secrets, like cracked vases that allow their contents to steal away. Often the passers by take these eccentric monologuists for madmen. Often the idle or curious follow, and amuse themselves by receiving these strange confidences. It was an indiscretion of this kind which told the ruin of Riscara the rich banker. Lambreth, the assassin of the Rue Venise, betrayed himself in a similar manner.

"What a vein!" said Père Tabaret. "What an incredible piece of good fortune! Gevrol has well said,

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that, after all, the cleverest agent of the police is chance. Who would have imagined such a history? I was not, however, very far from the reality. I smelt out an infant at the bottom of the mystery! But who would have dreamed of such a thing as the substitution?—an old sensational effect, used up long ago in plays and novels. This is a striking example of the danger of following preconceived ideas in police investigation. We are affrighted at unlikelihood; and, as in this case, the greatest unlikelihood proves often to be the truth. We retreat before the absurd; and the absurd turns out to be the very thing we should examine. Every thing is possible.

"I would not take a thousand crowns for the experiences of this evening. I shall kill two birds with one stone. I deliver up the criminal; and I give Noel a hearty clap on the shoulder to recover his title and his fortune. For once I shall not be sorry to see a boy raised to fortune from the school of adversity. But, pshaw! he will be like all the rest. Prosperity will turn his head. Already he begins to prate of his ancestors. Poor humanity!" he burst into a fit of laughter. "It is my friend Madame Gerdy who has astonished me most of all,—a woman to whom I would have given absolution before waiting to hear confess; and then to think that I was on the point of asking her hand in marriage! What a narrow escape! B-r-r-r!"

At this thought, the old fellow shivered. He saw himself married, and all on a sudden discovering the antecedents of Madame Tabaret, becoming mixed up with a scandalous prosecution, compromised, and rendered ridiculous.

"When I think," he went on laughing, as his thoughts took another direction,—"when I think of

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my worthy Gevrol running after the man with the earrings in his ears! Ha, ha! Travel, my boy, travel! Voyages inform youth. How vexed he will be when he hears of this! He will wish me dead. I must jest with him a little, just a little. I cannot help it. If he wishes to do me any injury, M. Daburon must protect me. Talking of Daburon. Am I not going to take a thorn out of his foot. I can see him from this spot opening his eyes like saucers, when I say to him, 'I have the rascal!' This investigation will bring him honor, when all the credit is due to me. He will, at the least, receive the cross of honor. So much the better. He will come to me again, this judge. If he is asleep, I am going to give him an agreeable awaking. How he will overpower me with questions! How he will want to know the end, before I can relate the beginning!"

Pére Tabaret, who was now crossing the bridge of St. Perè's, stopped suddenly. "Hold!" said he, "the details? I have not got them. I know the story only in the gross."

He continued his walk, and resumed,—"They are right at the office; I am too hasty. I am too fond of romancing, as Gevrol says. When I was with Noel I ought to have cross-examined him, until I extracted from him all those little points of evidence which now I can only guess at; but I was carried away. I drank in his words. I would willingly have had him tell the story in one sentence. But, after all, it is but natural. When one is in pursuit of a stag, he does not stop to shoot a blackbird. Besides, by insisting on minute particulars, I might have awakened suspicions in Noel's mind, and led him to discover that I am working up the case for the Rue Jerusalem. To be sure, I do not blush for my connection with the police; I am even vain of

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it; but I love to think that no one suspects it,—to see how stupid people are in not knowing the police who protect and guard them. And now for the interview; for here we are at the end of our journey."

M. Daburon had gone to bed, but had given orders to his servant; so that Père Tabaret had but to give his name, to be conducted to the magistrate's sleeping-room.

At sight of his amateur agent, the judge addressed him quickly,—

"There is something extraordinary! What have you discovered? have you got a clew?"

"Better than that," answered the old fellow, smiling at ease.

"Speak quickly!"

"I have got the culprit!"

Père Tabaret ought to have been satisfied; he certainly produced an effect. The judge bounded from his bed.

"Already?" said he. "Is it possible?"

"I have the honor to repeat to M. the judge of inquiry that I know the author of the crime of Jonchère."

"And I," said the judge,—"I proclaim you the most able of police agents past or future. I shall certainly never hereafter undertake an investigation without your assistance."

"You are too kind, monsieur. I have had little or nothing to do in the matter. The discovery is due to chance alone."

"You are modest, M. Tabaret. Chance assists only wise men. She disdains to aid the stupid; but I beg you will be seated and talk."

Then with a lucidity and precision of which few would have believed him capable the old fellow repeated to the judge all of Noel's story. He repeated from

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memory the extracts from the letters, almost without changing a word.

"These letters," added he, "I have seen; and I have even carried off one, in order to verify the writing. Here it is."

"Yes," murmured the magistrate,—"yes, M. Tabaret, you have discovered the criminal. The evidence is palpable, even to the blind. Heaven has willed this. Crime engenders crime. The misdeeds of the father have made the son an assassin."

"I have not given you the names, monsieur," said Père Tabaret. "I wished first to hear your opinion of the evidence."

"Oh! you can name them," interrupted the judge with a certain degree of animation. "If ever so high in position, they shall not escape the law. A French magistrate never hesitates."

"I know it, monsieur; but we are going high this time. The father who has sacrificed his legitimate to his natural son is the Count Rheteau de Commarin; and the assassin of the Widow Lerouge is the natural son, Albert Vicomte de Commarin!"

Père Tabaret, like an accomplished artist, had uttered these words with a deliberate emphasis, expecting confidently to produce a great impression. His attempt overshot itself. M. Daburon was struck with stupor. He remained motionless, his eyes dilated with astonishment. Mechanically he repeated it, like a strange word, the sense of which he was trying to understand.

"Albert de Commarin! Albert de Commarin!"

"Yes," insisted Père Tabaret, "the noble viscount. He is the last man in the world to be suspected, I know."

But he perceived the alteration of the judge's face; and, a little frightened, he approached the bed.

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"Are you unwell?" he asked.

"No," answered Daburon, without knowing what he said. "I am very well; but the surprise, the emotion,"—

"I understand that," said the old fellow.

"I wish you would leave me for a few minutes; but do not depart. We must converse at some length on this business. Will you step into my study? There ought to be a fire still burning there. I will rejoin you in an instant."

Then Daburon rose lightly from the bed, put on a dressing-gown, and seated himself, or rather fell, into an arm-chair. His face, to which the exercise of his austere functions had given the immobility of marble, reflected the most cruel agitation; while his eyes betrayed the inward agony of his soul.

The name of Commarin, suddenly pronounced, awakened in him the most sorrowful recollections, and tore open a wound but badly healed. This name recalled to him an event which had rudely extinguished his youth and broken his life. Involuntarily, he carried his thoughts back to this epoch, and compelled himself to taste again all its bitterness.

An hour ago, it had seemed to him far removed, and already hidden in the mists of the past. One word had sufficed to recall it, clear and distinct. It seemed to him now that this event with which he connected the name of Albert de Commarin dated from yesterday, instead of which two years had elapsed.

Pierre Marie Daburon belonged to one of the oldest families of Poitou. Three or four of his ancestors had filled successively the most considerable offices in the province. Why, then, had they not bequeathed a title and their arms to their descendants?

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The magistrate's worthy father inhabited an ugly modern castle; but it was surrounded by about eight hundred thousand francs' worth of the best land in France. His mother was a Cottevise-Luxe, from whom he inherited the blood of the highest nobility of Poitou, one of the most exclusive families in France, as every one knows.

When he was appointed a judge of inquiry in Paris, his parentage opened for him without delay five or six aristocratic salons; and he was not slow to extend his circle of acquaintance.

He possessed, however, few of the qualifications for social success. He was cold and grave even to sadness, reserved and timid to excess. His mind wanted brilliancy and lightness; he lacked the facility of repartee, and the amiable art of conversing without a subject,—which is almost a necessity in mixed companies. He could neither relate a *bon mot* nor pay a compliment. Like most men who feel deeply, he was unable to translate his impressions immediately. Reflection was necessary to him; and he fell back upon himself.

To compensate for these defects he possessed other qualities more solid,—nobility of sentiment, strength of character, and integrity of purpose. Those who knew him quickly learned to esteem his sound judgment, his keen sense of honor, and to discover under his cold exterior a warm heart, an excessive sensibility, and a delicacy almost feminine. In a word, although he might be eclipsed by the wits and triflers of a crowded salon, he charmed all hearts in a smaller circle, where he felt warmed by the purer atmosphere of sympathy.

He accustomed himself to go abroad a great deal. He reasoned, wisely perhaps, that a magistrate can make better use of his time than by remaining shut up in

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his study, in company with books of law. He thought a man, to be a judge, ought to know something of mankind; and, with that belief, he entered upon the study of the subject. An attentive and discreet observer, he examined around him the play of human interests and passions, exercised himself in disentangling and manœuvring at need the strings of the puppets he saw moving about him. Piece by piece, so to say, he labored to comprehend the working of the complicated machine called society, of which he was charged to overlook the movements, regulate the springs, and preserve the healthful action.

All on a sudden, towards the commencement of the winter of 1860 and 1861, Daburon disappeared. His friends sought for him; he was nowhere to be found. What had become of him? Inquiry resulted in the discovery that he passed nearly all his evenings at Madame d' Arlanges' house. The surprise was as great as it was natural.

This dear marquise was, or rather is,—for she is still in the land of the living,—a person rather out of date and rococo in the dowagers of the Princess de Southenay's circle. She is surely the most singular link between the eighteenth century and our own. How, and by what marvelous process she has been preserved such as we see her, from so remote an age to the present, is a more puzzling question than we can explain. Listening to her, you would swear that she was yesterday at one of the queen's soirées, whose passion for cards was the annoyance of Louis XIV., at whose parties the great ladies cheated openly in emulation of each other.

Manners, language, habits, even costume. she preserved them all; and, as time had touched them, not to

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beautify but to disfigure, the effect was not the most pleasing. A glimpse of her head-dress is more than a long article of review of the court of Louis XIV.; an hour's conversation, more than a volume of the "Confessions of Madame de Maintenon."

She was born in a little German principality, where her parents had taken refuge from their wild and rebellious people. She had been nursed, when a child, on the knees of old Emigrès, in a salon very old and very much gilded, resembling a cabinet of curiosities. Her mind was awakened amid the hum of antediluvian conversations, her imagination aroused by arguments a little less profitable than those of an assembly of dunces, convoked to decide the merits of a Greek hexameter. Here she imbibed a fund of ideas, which, applied to the forms of society to-day, are grotesque, as would be those of an individual shut up for twenty years in an Assyrian museum.

The empire, the restoration, the monarchy of July, the second republic, the second empire, have passed beneath her windows; but she has not taken the pains to open them. All that has taken place since '89 she ignores, or at most looks upon as a dream, a nightmare, and expects an awakening. She has seen every thing; but she has seen it through spectacles of her own making, which present objects not as they are, but as she wishes them to be.

At the age of sixty-eight, she was straight as an arrow, and had never known a day's sickness. She ate her four meals a day with the appetite of a grape-gatherer, and drank when she was thirsty. She was so vivacious and active that she never rested save when sleeping, or when seated at her favorite game of piquet. She professed an undisguised contempt for the silly wo-

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men of our century, who dine on the wing of a partridge, and talk you to death with philosophical disquisitions. Positive and over-bearing in all things, her word was prompt and easily understood. Her language was never rendered obscure by unnecessary delicacy. She never shrank from using the most appropriate words to express her meaning. If she offended some refined ears, so much the worse,—for their owners. What she most detested was hypocrisy.

She believed in God; but she believed also a little in Voltaire. In fact, her devotion was, to say the least, problematical. However, she was on good terms with the curate of her parish, and was very particular about the arrangement of her dinner on the days she honored him with an invitation to her table. She considered him a subaltern, very useful to her salvation, and deserving of the honor of opening for her the gate of paradise.

She was shunned like the plague. Everybody dreaded her high voice, her terrible indiscretion, and the frankness of speech she seemed to affect, in order to claim the right of saying the most unpleasant things before your face. Of all her family, there remained only her granddaughter, whose father had died very young.

Of a fortune originally large, she had been able to preserve but a small remnant, on which she supported her small household in genteel, or rather aristocratic poverty. She was, however, proprietor of the pretty little house in which she lived near the Invalides, situated between a rather narrow court and a very extensive and beautiful garden.

So circumstanced, she considered herself the most unfortunate of God's creatures, and passed the greater part of her time crying miserère! From time to time,

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she declared she expected to be reduced to absolute beggary, and to die in a hospital.

A friend of M. Daburon's presented him one evening to the Marquise d'Arlanges, having dragged him to her house in a mirthful mood, saying, "Come with me, and I will show you a phenomenon,—a ghost of the past in flesh and bone."

The marquise received the magistrate graciously enough; and her eccentricities amused him. On his second visit, she amused him still more; for which reason, he came a third time. But she amused him no longer; henceforth, every faculty of his soul was absorbed in studying the charms of the young and tender rose who was blooming into loveliness, in this to him henceforth enchanted dwelling.

Madame d'Arlanges conceived a violent friendship for him, and became eloquent in his praise.

"A most charming young man," she declared, "delicate and sensible! What a pity he was not born—" (Her ladyship meant born of noble parentage, but used the phrase as ignoring the fact of the unfortunates who are not noble having been born at all;) "although it is plainly to be seen he ought to be. His family, by the father's side, were people of considerable importance; and his mother was a Cottevise, who made a mesalliance. I approve of the young man, and shall advance him in the world by my countenance."

The strongest proof of the favorable impression he had made upon the marquise was, that she condescended to pronounce his name like the rest of the world. She preserved this affectation of forgetfulness of the names of people who were not "born," and who in consequence have no right to names. She was so confirmed in this habit, that, if by accident she pronounced the name of

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one of those people correctly, she repeated it immediately in some ridiculous manner.

At his first visit, the judge was amused tc hear his name changed every time she addressed him in the most unaccountable way. Successively she made it Taburon, Dabiron, Maliron, Laridon; but in less than three months, she called him Daburon as distinctly as if he had been a duke of something, and seigneur of somewhere.

On occasions, she amused herself, endeavoring to prove to the worthy magistrate that he must be noble, or at least ought to be. She would have been happy, if she had succeeded in making him wrap himself up in a title, and put a coat of arms upon his visiting cards.

"How is it possible," said she, "that your ancestors, eminent, wealthy, and influential, never thought of purchasing a title for their descendants? What a pity they have not left you some presentable coat of arms!"

"My ancestors were proud," responded M. Daburon. "They preferred being foremost among their fellow-citizens to becoming newly-created nobles."

Upon which the marquise explained, and proved to a demonstration, that between the most influential and wealthy untitled citizen and the smallest scion of nobility, there was an abyss that all the money in the world could not fill up.

They who were surprised at the frequency of the magistrate's visits to this celebrated "relic of the past" had no idea that the real attraction was not the marquise but her granddaughter, Claire, whose presence converted the old-fashioned house into a bower of enchantment.

Mademoiselle Claire d'Arlanges had already seen seventeen summers. She was very gracious and sweet in

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manner, and ravishing in her natural innocence and fearlessness of harm. She had blonde, ash-colored hair, very fine and thick, which she wore over a large roll above her forehead, and which fell in large masses upon her neck, in the most artless fashion imaginable. Her figure, though graceful, was rather slender; but her face recalled the celestial pictures of Guido. Her blue eyes, shaded by long lashes of a hue darker than her hair, had above all an adorable expression.

A certain air of antiquity, caught from association with her grandmother, added yet another charm to the young girl's manners. She had more sense, however, than her relative; and, as her education was not neglected, she had imbibed ideas of the world in which she lived sufficiently exact to preserve her from imitating her grandmother's absurdities. This education, these practical ideas, Claire owed to her governess, upon whose shoulders the marquise had thrown the sole responsibility of cultivating her mind.

This governess, Mademoiselle Schmidt, chosen at hazard, taken " with eyes shut," happened by the most fortunate chance to be both well informed and possessed of principle. She was, what is often met with on the other side of the Rhine, a woman at once romantic and practical, of the tenderest sensibility and the severest virtue. This good woman, while she carried her pupil into the land of sentimental phantasy and poetical imaginings, gave her at the same time the most practical instruction in matters relating to actual life; and, while she deprived Claire of all the peculiarities of thought and manner that rendered her grandmother so ridiculous, she preserved in her mind all the respect that was due to her position and the relations between them.

This was the young girl who attracted M. Daburon to

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Madame d'Arlanges' salon where he sat evening after evening, listening, without hearing, to her rigmaroles, her interminable anecdotes of the emigration; while he gazed upon Claire, as a fanatic upon his idol. Often, in his ecstasy, he forgot where he was for the moment, absolutely became oblivious of the old lady's presence; although her shrill voice was piercing the tympanum of his ear, as a needle goes through cloth. Suddenly recalled to consciousness, he answered her at cross-purposes, committing the most singular blunders, which he labored afterwards to explain. But this did not much impede the conversation. Madame d'Arlanges did not perceive her courtier's absence of mind; and her questions were of such a length, and succeeded each other so rapidly, that the answers were of little consequence. Having a listener, she was satisfied, provided that from time to time he gave signs of life.

When obliged to sit down to piquet, he cursed below his breath the game and its detestable inventor. He paid no attention to his cards. He made mistakes every moment, dealt without seeing, and forgot to cut. The old dame was annoyed by these continual distractions; but she did not scruple to profit by them. She watched the deal, rectified all mistakes; while she counted audaciously points she never made, and pocketed his money without remorse.

As Daburon's timidity was extreme, and Claire was unsociable to excess, they never spoke to each other. During the entire winter, the judge did not address ten times a direct word to the young girl; and, on these rare occasions, he had learned by heart mechanically the phrase he proposed to repeat to her, well knowing that, without this precaution, he would be obliged to remain silent.

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But at least he saw her, he breathed the same air with her, he heard her voice, whose pure and harmonious vibrations thrilled his very soul.

By constantly watching her eyes, he learned to understand all their expressions. He believed he could read in them all her thoughts, and through them look into her soul as into an open window.

"She is pleased to-day," said he to himself; and then he was happy. At other times, he thought, "She has met with some annoyance to-day;" and immediately he became sad.

The idea of asking for her hand many times presented itself to his imagination; but he never dared to entertain it. Knowing, as he did, the marquise's prejudices, her devotion to titles, her dread of mesalliance, he was convinced she would reject his suit; and he did not dare to risk the dissolution of his present happiness upon so slender a hope of success. Poor man! he had reached the altitude of love where it feeds upon its own misery.

"Once repulsed," he thought, "the house is shut against me; and then farewell to happiness: this life is finished for me."

Upon the other hand, the very rational thought occurred to him that some other might see Mademoiselle d'Arlanges; seeing, love her, and in consequence, demand and perhaps obtain her.

In either case, hazarding a proposal, or hesitating still, he must certainly lose her in the end. By the commencement of spring, his mind was made up.

One fine afternoon, in the month of April, he bent his steps towards the Hotel d'Arlanges, having truly need of more bravery than if he were a soldier about to face a battery. He, like the soldier, whispered to himself "Victory or death!" The marquise, who had gone out

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shortly after breakfast, had just returned in a terrible rage, and was uttering screams like an eagle.

This was what had taken place. She had had some work done by a neighboring painter some eight or ten months before; and the workman presented himself a hundred times to receive payment, without avail. Tired of this proceeding, he had summoned the high and mighty Marquise d'Arlanges before the courts.

This summons had exasperated the marquise; but she kept the matter to herself, having decided, in her wisdom, to call upon the judge of the court himself, and request him to reprimand the insolent painter who had dared to plague her for a paltry sum of money. The result of this fine project may be guessed. The judge had been compelled to eject her forcibly from his office; hence her fury.

M. Daburon found her in the rose-colored boudoir in half dishabille, and complete disorder of head-dress, red as a peony, surrounded by the debris of glass and china which had fallen under her hands in the first moments of her passion. To complete her annoyance, Claire and her governess were gone out. An excited and terrified *femme de chambre* was inundating the old lady with water, in the hope of calming her nerves.

She received Daburon as a messenger direct from Providence. In a little more than half an hour, she told her story, interlarded with interjections and imprecations.

"Do you comprehend this judge?" cried she. "This must be some frantic Jacobin,—some son of the furies, who washed their hands in the blood of their king. Oh! my friend, I read stupor and indignation on your visage. He has listened to the complaint of this buffoon, to whom I had given the means of living, by employing

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him. And when I waited upon him in his office, and addressed to him, as I owed it to myself to do, some severe remonstrances, he actually turned me out of the room! me! turned me out!"

At this painful recollection, she made a fierce gesture with her arms. In her sudden movement, she struck a superb flacon, which the *femme de chambre* was holding. The blow dashed it to pieces against the wall of the boudoir.

"Stupid, awkward fool!" she cried, turning her anger upon the frightened girl.

Daburon, stunned at first, now endeavored to calm her exasperation. She did not allow him to pronounce three words.

"Happily you are here," she continued! "I have told you all. I count upon you! you will exercise your influence, your powerful friends, your credit, to have this pitiful painter and this miscreant of a judge flung into some deep ditch, to teach them the respect due to a woman of my rank."

The magistrate did not permit himself even to smile at this imperative demand. He had heard many speeches as absurd issue from her lips without daring to perceive their absurdity. Was she not Claire's grandmother? for that he loved and venerated her. He blessed her for her granddaughter, as an admirer of nature blesses heaven for the wild flower that delights him with its perfume.

The fury of the old lady was terrible; nor was it of short duration. It was able, like the anger of Achilles, to last through ten chapters. At the end of an hour, however, she was, or appeared to be pacified. They replaced her head-dress, repaired the disorder of her toilette, and picked up the fragments of broken china. Van-

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quished by her own violence, the reaction was immediate and complete. She fell back helpless and exhausted in the arm-chair.

This magnificent result was due to the magistrate. To accomplish it, he had to use all his ability, to exercise the most angelic patience, the greatest tact. His triumph was the more meritorious, because he came unprepared for this adventure, which interfered with his intended proposal. He had arrived filled with something like a resolve to speak of his wishes; and this untoward event declared against him: but he had a good heart to oppose to misfortune.

Arming himself with his professional eloquence, he talked the old lady into calmness. He was not so foolish as to contradict her. On the contrary, he caressed her hobby. He was humorous and pathetic by turns. He attacked the authors of the revolution, cursed its errors, deplored its crimes, and reviewed its disastrous results. From the infamous Marat, by an adroit allusion he attacked the infamous judge who had offended her. He abused the scandalous conduct of the magistrate in good set terms, and was awfully severe upon the dishonest scamp of a painter. He declared that they deserved the lowest dungeon in the Bastile; but the conclusion to which he arrived was, that the severest blow she could administer to the man's impertinence and the judge's incapacity would be to pay the bill, and compel them to give her a receipt in full for all demands.

The disconnected syllable "pay" brought Madame d'Arlanges to her feet in the fercest attitude.

"Pay!" she screamed. "In order that these scoundrels may persist in their obduracy? encourage them by a culpable weakness? Never! And, moreover, to pay, it is necessary to have money; and I have none!"

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"Why," said the judge, "it amounts to but eighty-seven francs!"

"And is that nothing?" asked the marquise: "you talk very easily, M. Daburon. It is easy to see that you have money: your ancestors were people of no rank: and the revolution passed a hundred feet above their heads. Who can tell whether they may not have been the gainers by it? It has taken all from the d'Arlanges. What will they do to me, if I do not pay?"

"Well, madame le marquise, many things,—ruin you, in short: you will receive a notification from the courts. If that is not attended to, your furniture will be seized."

"Alas!" cried the old lady, "the revolution is not over yet. We have not passed through all its horrors! How fortunate you are, M. Daburon, in being of the people! I see plainly that I must pay this man; and it is frightfully sad for me, who have nothing, and am forced to make such sacrifices for sake of my grand-child!"

The word "sacrifices" surprised the magistrate so strongly that involuntarily he repeated it half-aloud, "Sacrifices?"

"Certainly!" replied Madame d'Arlanges. "Without her, would I have to live as I am doing, refusing myself every thing to make both ends meet? Was it not for her sake I placed all that I possessed in the funds, and lost it? But I do not consider myself. I know, thank heaven, the duties of a mother; and I guard all mine well for my little Claire."

To this extraordinary devotion, M. Daburon had no reply to make.

"Ah! this dear child torments me terribly," continued the marquise. "I confess, M. Daburon, it makes me giddy when I think of her establishment."

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The judge reddened with pleasure. The occasion had come at a gallop. She was turning to leave the room, when he detained her.

"It seems to me," stammered he, "that to establish Mademoiselle Claire ought to be easy."

"Unfortunately, it is any thing but easy. She is pretty enough, although unpolished; but, now-a-days, beauty goes for nothing. Men are so mercenary they think only of money. I do not know of one who has the manhood to take a d'Arlanges with her bright eyes for a dowry."

"I believe that you exaggerate," said the judge timidly.

"By no means. Besides, when I find a son-in-law, he will cause me a thousand troubles. Of this, I am assured by my lawyer. I can be compelled, it seems, to render an account of Claire's patrimony. As if I ever kept accounts! It is shameful. Ah! if Claire had any sense of filial duty, she would quietly take the veil in some convent. I would use every effort to pay the necessary dower; but she has no affection for me."

Daburon felt that the time to speak had arrived. He collected his courage, as a good horseman pulls his horse together the moment he faces the leap, and in a voice which he tried to render firm, commenced,—

"Madame, I know, I believe, just the person for Mademoiselle Claire,—an honest man, who loves her, and who will do every thing in the world to make her happy."

"That," said Madame d'Arlanges, "is always understood."

"The man of whom I speak," continued the judge, "is still young, and is rich. He will be only too happy to receive Mademoiselle Claire without dowry. Not

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only will he decline an examination of your accounts of guardianship, but he will supply you with means to free your own property of all incumbrance."

"Peste!" exclaimed the old dame; "you are not a bad friend, M. Daburon!"

"If you prefer to place your fortune in an annuity, your son-in-law will make good whatever deficiency remains."

"Ah! I am suffocating. If you have known such a man, why have you not already presented him?"

"I did not dare, madame: I was afraid."

"Quick! tell me who is this admirable son-in-law,—this white blackbird? where does he nestle?"

The judge felt a strange fluttering of the heart: he was going to stake his happiness on a word. At length, he stammered,—

"It is I, madame!"

His voice, his look, his suppliant gesture, were ridiculous in the eyes of the old lady; and she laughed till the tears came. He, frightened at his own audacity, stunned at having vanquished his timidity, was on the point of falling at her feet. At last, raising her shoulders, she cried,—

"My dear Daburon, you are too ridiculous! In good truth, you will make me die of laughing."

But suddenly, in the very height of her merriment she stopped, and assumed her most dignified air.

"Are you perfectly serious in all you have told me, M. Daburon?"

"I have stated the truth," murmured the judge.

"You are very rich, then?"

"I have, madame, in right of my mother, about twenty thousand livres a year. One of my uncles died about a year ago, leaving me a hundred thousand

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crowns. My father is worth not less than a million. Were I to ask him for the half to-morrow, he would give it to me. He would give me all his fortune, if it were necessary to my happiness, and be but too well contented, should I relieve him of its administration."

Madame d'Arlanges made a sign to him to be silent; and, for five good minutes at least, she remained plunged in reflection, her forehead resting in her hands. At length she raised her head.

"Hear me," said she. "Had you been so hardy as to make this proposal to Claire's father, he would have called his servants to show you the door; but I am old and desolate. I am poor. My grandchild's prospects disquiet me; and that is my excuse for not acting in like manner. I cannot, however, consent to speak to Claire of this horrible mesalliance. This much I can promise you; and it is much, I will not be against you. Take your own measures. Pay your addresses to Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Let her decide. If she says 'yes,' I shall not say 'no.'"

Daburon transported with happiness, would have embraced the old lady, if he dared. He never dreamed of the facility with which this fierce soul had been brought to yield. He was delirious.

"Wait!" said the old lady; "your cause is not yet gained. Your mother, it is true, was a Cottevise; and I must excuse her for marrying so wretchedly: but your father is Sieur Daburon. This name, my dear friend, is simply ridiculous. Do you think it will be possible to wrap up in Daburon a young girl who for eighteen years has been called d'Arlanges?"

This objection did not seem to trouble the judge.

"After all," continued the old lady, "your father has gained a Cottevise: you may win a d'Arlanges; and, on

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the strength of an alliance with the daughter of a house whose nobility has descended from sire to son for so many generations, the Daburons may end by being ennobled. Who knows? One last advice: you believe Claire to be just as she looks,—timid, sweet, obedient. Undeceive yourself, my friend. With her saintly air and delicate touch, she is hardy, fierce, and obstinate as the marquis her father was, who resembled a mule of Auvergne. You see, I forewarn you. Our conditions are agreed to, are they not? Let us say no more on the subject. I wish you every success."

This scene was so present to his mind as he sat there at midnight in his own house in his arm-chair, after so long a lapse of time that he still seemed to hear the old lady's voice; and this word "success" sounded in his ear.

He departed in triumph from the Hotel d'Arlanges, which he had entered with a heart swelling with anxiety.

He walked with his head high, his chest dilated, breathing the air with full respirations.

He was so happy! The sky appeared to him more blue, the sun more brilliant.

The grave magistrate felt a mad desire to stop the passers by, to press them in his arms, to cry to them,—

"Do you not know, the marquise consents?"

He walked; and the earth seemed to him to bound beneath his steps. He felt too small to contain his happiness, too light to remain on earth. He was going to fly away toward the stars.

What a castle in Spain did he build upon this little word of the marquise! He tendered his resignation. He built on the banks of the Loire, not far from Tours, an enchanting little villa. He saw it smiling, with its

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façade to the rising sun, seated in the midst of flowers, and shaded with great trees. He furnished this dwelling as if for the reception of the queen of the fairies. He wished to provide a casket worthy the pearl he was going to possess, for he had not a dread of shipwreck, to obscure the horizon made radiant by his hopes, not a voice at the bottom of his heart raised itself to cry, "Beware!"

From this time, his visits to the marquise became more frequent. He might be said to live at her house.

While he preserved his respectful and reserved demeanor towards Claire, he strove assiduously to be something in her life. He strove to conquer his timidity, to speak to this well beloved of his soul,—to converse with her, to interest her.

He went in quest of novelty, to amuse her. He read all the new books, and brought to her all that were fit for her to read.

Little by little he succeeded, thanks to the most delicate persistence, in taming his wood pigeon. He began to perceive that her fear of him had almost disappeared, that she no longer received him with the cold and haughty air which so long had kept him at a distance He felt that insensibly he was advancing in her confidence. She still blushed when she spoke to him; but she no longer hesitated to address the first word. She even ventured at times to ask him a question. She had heard a play spoken of, and wished to know the subject. M. Daburon quickly ran to see it, and committed a complete account of it to writing, which he addressed to her by mail. At times she entrusted him with trifling commissions, the execution of which he would not have exchanged for a Russian embassy.

Once he ventured to send her a magnificent bouquet.

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She accepted it with an air of suppressed disquietude, and begged him not to repeat the offering.

The tears came to his eyes; and he left her presence wounded,—the unhappiest of men.

But, three days after, she raised him from this despair, by begging him to look for certain flowers, then very much in fashion, she wanted for her little garden. He sent enough to fill the house from the garret to the cellar.

"She loves me," he whispered to himself.

These little events, so great, had not interrupted the parties at piquet; only the young girl now appeared interested in the game, nearly always taking part with the judge against the marquise. She did not understand the game very well; but, when the old gambler cheated too openly, she would perceive it, and say laughing,—

"She is robbing you, M. Daburon,—she is robbing you!"

He would willingly be robbed of his entire fortune, to hear that sweet voice raised for him.

It was summer.

Often in the evening she accepted his arm; and, while the marquise remained in the porch, seated in her armchair, they walked around the garden, treading lightly upon the paths spread with gravel, sifted so fine that the trailing of her light robe effaced the traces of their footsteps. She chatted gaily with him, as with a beloved brother; while he was obliged to do violence to his feelings, to refrain from imprinting a kiss upon the little blonde head, from which the light breeze lifted the curls and scattered them like fleecy clouds. At such moments, he seemed to tread a triumphant path, strewn with flowers, and saw at the end happiness.

He attempted to speak of his hopes to the marquise

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"You know what we have agreed upon," she would say. "Not a word. Already does the voice of conscience reproach me with my fault in lending my countenance to this abomination. To think that I may one day have a granddaughter who calls herself Daburon! I must petition the king, my friend, to change this name."

If, instead of intoxicating himself with dreams of happiness, this acute observer had studied the character of his idol, the effect might have been to put him upon his guard.

In the mean while, he remarked singular alterations in her humor. On certain days she was gay and careless as a child. Then, for a week, she would remain sombre and dejected. Seeing her in this state the day following a ball, to which her grandmother had taken her, he dared to ask her the reason of her sadness.

"Oh! that," answered she, heaving a deep sigh, "is my secret,—a secret of which even my grandmother knows nothing."

Daburon looked at her. He thought he saw a tear between her long eyelashes.

"One day," continued she, "I may confide in you: it will be necessary, perhaps."

The judge was blind and deaf.

"I also," answered he, "have a secret, which I wish to confide to you in return."

When retiring after midnight, he said to himself, "To-morrow I will confess every thing to her."

There passed a little more than fifty days, during which he kept repeating to himself,—

"To-morrow!"

One evening in the month of August,—the heat all

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day had been overpowering,—a breeze had risen. The leaves rustled: there were signs of a storm in the atmosphere.

They were seated together at the bottom of the garden, under the arbor, adorned with flowers which Claire had planted; and, through the branches, they perceived the fluttering head-dress of the marquise, who was taking her accustomed walk after supper.

They had remained a long time without speaking, enjoying the perfume of the flowers, the calm beauty of the evening. Daburon had ventured to take the young girl's hand.

It was the first time; and the touch of her slender fingers thrilled through every fibre of his frame, and drove the blood surging to his brain.

"Mademoiselle," stammered he, "Claire."

She stopped him, by turning upon him her beautiful eyes, filled with astonishment.

"Pardon me," continued he,—"pardon me. I have addressed your grandmother, before venturing to speak to you. Do you not understand me, Claire? A word from your lips decides my future happiness or misery. Claire, mademoiselle, I love you!"

While the magistrate was speaking, the young girl looked at him as though doubtful of the evidence of her senses; but at the words, "I love you!" pronounced with the trembling accents of passion, she disengaged her hand rudely, and uttered a stifled cry.

"You," murmured she,—"is this really true?"

M. Daburon at this, the most critical moment of his life, was powerless to utter a word. The presentiment of an immense misfortune oppressed his heart. What divined he, when he saw Claire burst into a flood of tears.

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She hid her face between her hands, and repeated,—

"I am very unhappy, very unhappy!"

"You unhappy?" cried the magistrate. "And through me, Claire? You are cruel! In heaven's name, what have I done? What is the matter? Speak! Any thing rather than this anxiety, which is killing me!"

He knelt before her on the gravelled walk, and made an attempt to again take her hand. She repulsed him with an imploring gesture.

"Let me weep," said she; "you are going to hate me. I feel it. Who knows, to despise me, perhaps? And yet I swear before heaven that I was ignorant of what you have just said to me, that I had not even a suspicion of it!"

Daburon remained upon his knees, awaiting his doom.

"Yes," continued Claire, "you will think you have been the victim of a detestable coquetry. I see it now! I comprehend every thing! Is it possible, that, without a profound love, a man cannot be all that you have been to me? Alas! I was deceived. I gave myself up to the great happiness of having a friend! Am I not alone in the world, as if lost in a desert? Mad and imprudent, I devoted myself to you without reflection, as to the most indulgent of fathers."

These words revealed to the unfortunate judge a complete understanding of his error. As a hammer of steel it smashed into a thousand fragments the fragile edifice of his hopes. He raised himself slowly; and, in a tone of involuntary reproach, he repeated,—

"Your father!"

The young girl felt how deeply she had wounded him; but she knew not the intense depth of his love.

"Yes," she repeated, "a father! Seeing you so grave and austere, become for me so good, so indulgent,

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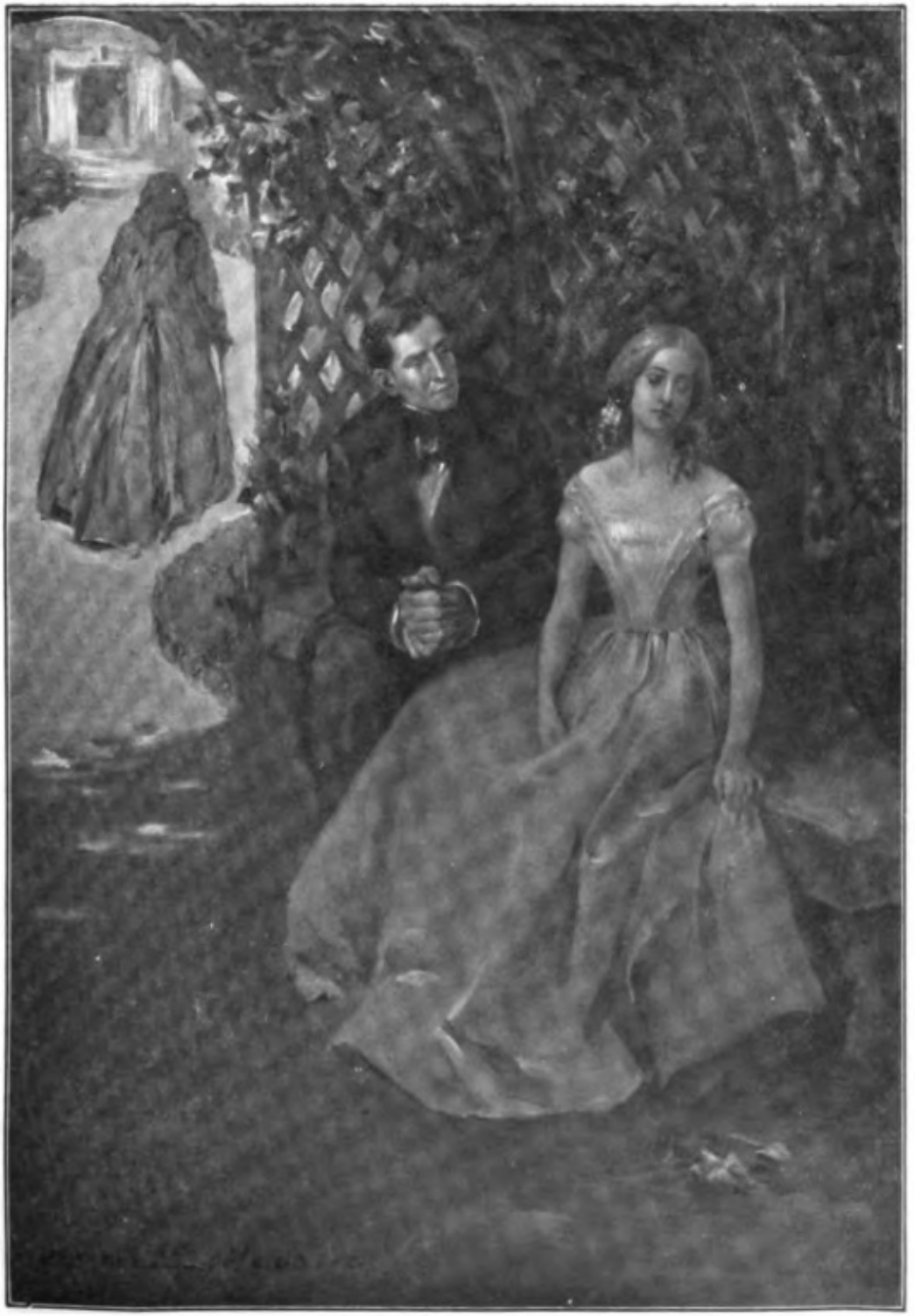

"Claire—Mademoiselle—I love you."

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I thanked heaven for sending me a protector to replace the father I have lost."

Daburon could not restrain a sob; his heart was breaking.

"One word," continued Claire,—"one single word, would have enlightened me. That word, until to-night, you have never pronounced. And with what comfort I have leaned upon you, as an infant upon its mother; with what inward joy I have said to myself, 'I am sure of one friend,—one heart into which runs the overflow of mine.' Ah! why was not my confidence greater? Why have I withheld my secret from you? I would have avoided this fearful calamity. I ought to have long since told what I must tell you now. I belong not to myself, but to another, to whom I have freely and with happiness given my life."

To hover in the clouds, and suddenly be cast rudely to the earth. The sufferings of the judge are not to be described.

"Better had I had the courage to speak long since," answered he; "yet, no: I owe to silence six months of delicious illusions,—six months of enchanting dreams. This shall be my share of life's happiness."

The last beams of closing day permitted the magistrate again to see Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. Her beautiful face was blanched to a deathlike whiteness, and was immovable in its expression as marble. Large tears rolled silently down her cheeks. Daburon seemed to contemplate the frightful spectacle of a weeping statue.

"You love another," said he at length,—"another? and your grandmother is ignorant? Claire, you cannot have chosen a man unworthy of your love? How is it your grandmother does not receive him?"

"There are certain obstacles," murmured Claire,—

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"obstacles which perhaps we may never be able to remove; but a girl like me can love but once. She marries him she loves, or she remains with heaven!"

"Certain obstacles," said Daburon in a hollow voice. "You love a man: he knows it; and he meets with obstacles?"

"I am poor," answered Mademoiselle d'Arlanges; "and his family is immensely rich. His father is cruel, inexorable."

"His father," cried the magistrate, with a bitterness he did not dream of hiding,—"his father, his family; and that withholds him? You are poor: he is rich; and that stops him, and he knows you love him? Ah! why am I not in his place; and why have not I against me the entire universe? What sacrifice could compare with love like mine? Nay, would it be a sacrifice? What to others might appear so, to me would be simply joy. Suffer, struggle, wait, so long as hope remains; that is to love."

"It is thus I love," said Claire with simplicity.

This answer crushed the judge. He understood that for him there was no hope; but he felt a terrible enjoyment in plumbing the depth of his misfortune.

"But," insisted he, "how have you known him, spoken to him? Where? When? Madame d'Arlanges receives no one."

"I will tell you every thing," answered she in a decided tone. "It is a long time since I have known him. It was at the house of one of my grandmother's friends, who was a cousin of his,—old Mademoiselle Goello,—that I saw him for the first time. There we first met; there we meet each other now."

"Ah!" cried Daburon to himself, "I remember now. A few days before your visit to Mademoiselle

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Goello, you are gayer than usual; and, when you return, you are often sad."

"That is because I see how much he is pained by the obstacles he cannot overcome."

"His family is, then, so illustrious," said he, "that it disdains alliance with yours?"

"You shall know every thing, without question, monsieur," answered Mademoiselle d'Arlanges. "His name is Albert de Commarin."

The marquise, at this moment, thinking she had walked enough, prepared to regain her rose-colored boudoir. She approached the arbor.

"Incorruptible magistrate!" said she, in her great voice, "the table is set for piquet."

Mechanically the magistrate arose, stammering, "I am coming."

Claire held his arm.

"I have not asked you to be secret, monsieur," said she.

"O mademoiselle!" said the judge, wounded by this appearance of doubt.

"I know," said Claire, "that I can count upon you; but, come what will, my tranquillity is lost."

Daburon regarded her with an air of surprise; his eye questioned her.

"It is certain," said she, answering the look, "that what I, a young and inexperienced girl, have failed to see, has not been unnoticed by my grandmother. That she has continued to receive you is a tacit encouragement of your addresses; which I consider, permit me to say, as very honorable to me."

"I have already mentioned, Mademoiselle, that the marquise has deigned to authorize my hopes."

And briefly he related his interview with Madame

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d'Arlanges, having the delicacy to omit absolutely the question of money, which had so strongly influenced the old lady.

"I see very plainly what effect this will have on my peace," said she sadly, "when she learns that I have not received your homage."

"You do not know me, mademoiselle," said he. "I have nothing to say to the marquise. I will retire; and all will be concluded."

"Oh! you are good and generous, I know!"

"I will go away," pursued Daburon; "and soon you will have forgotten even the name of the unfortunate whose life is broken."

"You do not mean what you say?" asked the young girl quickly.

"Well, no. I will flatter myself with a hope, that, later, my remembrance will not be without pleasure to you. Sometimes you will say 'He loved me,' and think of me as a friend,—your most devoted friend."

Claire, in her turn, took with emotion his hands within her own.

"Yes," said she; "you must remain my friend. Let us forget what has happened,—what you have said to-night,—and remain to me, as in the past, the best, the most indulgent of brothers."

The darkness had come, and she could not see him; but she knew he was weeping, for he was slow to answer.

"Is it possible," murmured he at length, "that you can ask that? Do you, who talk to me of forgetting, feel the power to forget? Do you **not** know that I love you a thousand times more than you love—"

He stopped, unable to pronounce the name of Com-

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marin; and then, with an effort, he added, "and I shall love you always."

He had left the arbor, and was now on the steps of the porch.

"And now, mademoiselle, adieu! You will see me again rarely. I shall only return often enough to avoid the appearance of a rupture."

His voice trembled, so that with difficulty he made it distinct.

"Whatever may come in the future," added he, "remember that there is one in the world who belongs to you absolutely. If ever you have need of a friend's devotion, come to me, come to your friend. Let me go. It is over. I have courage, Claire. Mademoiselle, for the last time, adieu!"

She was little less dismayed than he was. Instinctively she advanced her head; and M. Daburon touched lightly with his cold lips, for the first and last time, the forehead of her he loved so well.

They mounted the steps, she leaning on his arm, and entered the rose-colored boudoir where the marquise was seated, impatiently shuffling the cards, while awaiting her victim.

"Now, then, incorruptible judge," cried she.

But Daburon felt sick at heart. He could not have held the cards. He stammered some absurd excuses, spoke of pressing affairs, of duties to be attended to, of unexpected news, and went out, clinging to the walls.

His departure made the old cardplayer indignant. She turned to her granddaughter, who was endeavoring to hide her confusion behind the wax candles of the card-table, and demanded,—

"What has happened to M. Daburon this evening?"

"I do not know, madame," stammered Claire.

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"It appears to me," continued the marquise, "that the little judge permits himself to take singular liberties. He must be reminded of his proper place, or he will finish by believing himself our equal."

Claire essayed to justify the magistrate.

"He has been complaining all the evening, grandmamma; may he not be sick?"

"What if he should be?" exclaimed the old lady. "Is it not his duty to exercise some self-denial, in return for the honor of our company? I think I have already related to you the story of your granduncle, the Duke de St. Hurluge, who, having attended the king's hunting party, on their return from the chase lost with the best grace in the world two hundred and twenty pistoles. All the assembly remarked his gaiety and his good humor. The following day it was learned, that, during the chase, he had fallen from his horse and had sat at his majesty's card-table with a broken rib, rather than mar the enjoyment of the company by a complaint. Nobody made any outcry, so perfectly natural did an act of ordinary politeness appear in those days. This little judge, if he is sick, should have given proof of his breeding by saying nothing about it, and remaining for my piquet. But he is as well as I am. Who can tell what games he has gone to play elsewhere?"

CHAPTER VII.

DABURON did not return home on leaving the Hotel d'Arlanges. All the night he wandered at random, he knew not whither, seeking a little coolness for his burning head, a little calm for his overloaded and bursting heart.

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"Fool that I was," said he to himself. "Thousand times fool to have hoped, to have believed, that she would ever love me. Insensible! how could I have dreamed of possessing so much grace, nobleness, and beauty! How charming she was this evening, when her face was wet with tears. Could any thing be more angelic? What a sublime expression her eyes had in speaking of him! How she must love him! And I? She loves me as a father. She told me so,—as a father. And could it be otherwise? Is it not justice? Ought she to see a lover in this magistrate, sombre and severe, always as sad as his black costume? Was it not a crime to dream of uniting that virginal simplicity to my detestable worldly science? For her, the future is yet the land of smiling chimeras; and long since experience has dissipated all my illusions. She is as young as Innocence: I am as old as Vice."

The unfortunate magistrate made himself veritably a horror. He understood Claire, and he excused her. He even wished he could himself suffer the sadness he had brought upon her. He reproached himself with having cast a shadow upon her life. He could not forgive himself for having spoken of his love. Ought he not to have foreseen what had happened,—that she would refuse him, that he would thus deprive himself of the happiness of seeing her, of hearing her, of silently adoring her?

"A young and romantic girl," pursued the judge, "must have a lover she can dream of,—whom she can caress in imagination, as an ideal, pleasing herself by seeing in him every great and brilliant quality, imagining him full of nobleness, of bravery, of heroism. What would she see, if, in my absence, she dreamed of me? Her imagination would present me dressed in a funeral

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robe, in the depth of a gloomy dungeon, engaged with some foul criminal. Is it not my trade to descend into all the moral sinks, to stir up the foulness of crime? Am I not compelled to wash in secrecy and shadow the foul linen of society? Ah! it is a fatal profession. Am I punished thus, because, like the priest, the judge should condemn himself to solitude and celibacy? Both know all: they hear all, their costumes are nearly the same; but, while the priest in the fold of his black robe carries consolation, the judge carries terror. One is mercy, the other chastisement. Such are the images awakened; while the other,—the other—"

The wretched man continued his headlong course along the deserted quays.

He went with his head bare, his eyes haggard. To breathe more freely he had torn off his cravat and thrown it to the winds.

Sometimes, unconsciously, he crossed the path of a solitary wayfarer, who would pause, touched with pity, and turn to watch the retreating figure of the unfortunate wretch he thought deprived of reason.

In a by-road, near Grenelle, some officers stopped, and tried to question him. He mechanically tendered them his card. They read it, and permitted him to pass, convinced that he was drunk.

Anger,—a furious anger, began to replace his first feeling of resignation. In his heart arose a hate, stronger and more violent than even his love for Claire.

This other, this preferred, this noble viscount, who could not overcome these paltry obstacles, oh, that he had him there, under his knee!

At this moment, this noble and proud man, this magistrate, so severe and grave, felt an irresistible longing for vengeance. He began to understand the hate that

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armed itself with the poniard, and lay in ambush in dark corners; which struck in the darkness, whether in the face or in the back, it mattered little, but which struck, which killed,—whose vengeance blood alone could satisfy.

At this very hour, he was charged with the conduct of an inquiry into the case of an unfortunate young girl, accused of having stabbed one of her wretched companions.

She was jealous of this woman, who had tried to take her lover from her. He was a soldier, very fat and very ugly.

Daburon felt himself seized with pity for this miserable creature, whom he had commenced to examine the day previous.

She was very ugly,—truly repulsive; but the expression of her eyes, when speaking of her soldier, returned to the memory of the judge.

"She loved him veritably," thought he. "If each one of her jurors could suffer what I am suffering now, she would be acquitted. But how many men have had in their lives a passion? Perhaps not one in twenty."

He resolved to recommend this girl to the indulgence of the tribunal, and extenuate as much as he could the punishment of her crime.

He had himself resolved upon the commission of a crime.

He was resolved to kill Albert de Commarin.

During the rest of the night, he did but confirm himself in this resolution, demonstrating by a thousand mad reasons, which he found solid and inscrutable, the necessity for another legitimacy of this vengeance.

At seven o'clock in the morning, he found himself in an alley of the Bois de Boulogne, not far from the lake.

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He gained the Maillot gate, called a carriage, and was driven to his house.

The delirium of the night continued, but without suffering. He was conscious of no fatigue,—calm and cool apparently, but under the empire of an hallucination,—in a state approaching somnambulism.

He reflected and reasoned, but without reason.

He dressed himself with care, as was his custom formerly when visiting the Marquise d'Arlanges, and went out.

He first called at an armorers, and bought a small revolver, which he caused to be carefully loaded under his own eyes, and put into his pocket. He threw himself in the way of persons he supposed capable of informing him to what club the viscount belonged. No one perceived the strange situation of his mind, so natural were his manners and conversation.

It was not until the afternoon he found a young friend, a member of Albert de Commarin's club, who offered to conduct him thither and present him.

Daburon accepted warmly, and accompanied his friend.

While passing along he grasped with frenzy the handle of the revolver, which he kept concealed, thinking only of the murder he determined to commit, and the means of insuring the accuracy of his aim.

"This will make," thought he, "a terrible scandal; above all, if I do not succeed: Well, if I fail, I shall go mad. They will arrest me,—throw me into prison. I shall be placed upon trial at the court of assize, my name dishonored! Bast! what does that import to me? I am not loved by Claire. What to me is all the rest. My father without doubt will die of grief; but *I must be revenged.*"

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Arrived at the club, his friend pointed out to him a very distinguished looking young man, of a brown complexion, with a haughty air, or what appeared so to him, who, seated at a table, was reading a review. It was the viscount.

Daburon marched upon him without drawing his revolver. Arrived within two paces, his heart failed him: he turned suddenly and fled, leaving his friend astonished at a scene, to him utterly inexplicable.

Albert de Commarin will be as near death but once again.

When he reached the street, Daburon felt the ground flying beneath his feet,—every thing turning around him. He tried, but was unable to cry out: he struck at the air with his hands, reeled an instant, and then fell helpless on the pavement.

The passers by ran and assisted the police to raise him. In one of his pockets they found his address, and carried him to his house. When he recovered his senses, he lay upon his bed, at the foot of which he perceived his father.

"What has taken place?" he asked. With much caution they told him, that for six weeks he had wavered between life and death. The doctors had declared his life saved; and, now that reason was restored, all would go well.

Five minutes' conversation exhausted him. He shut his eyes, and tried to collect his ideas; but they whirled hither and thither wildly, as autumn leaves in the wind. The past seemed shrouded in a dark mist; yet, in the midst of all the darkness and confusion, the memory of his scene with Mademoiselle d'Arlanges stood out before his mental vision clear and luminous. All his actions up to the moment when he embraced Claire were

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marked, as in a picture strongly drawn. He trembled; and his hair was in a moment damp with perspiration.

He had failed to become an assassin.

The proof that he was restored to full possession of his faculties was, that a question of criminal law crossed his brain.

"The crime committed," said he to himself, "should I have been condemned? Yes. Was I responsible? No. Would an action committed in a state of mental alienation be a crime? Was I mad? Or was I in a peculiar state of mind which always precedes an illegal attempt? Who can answer? Why have not all judges passed through an incomprehensible crisis such as mine? Who would believe me, were I to recount my experience?"

Some days later, he was sufficiently recovered to tell his father all. The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders, and assured him it was but a reminiscence of his delirium.

The good old man was moved at the story of his son's luckless wooing, without seeing therein an irreparable misfortune. He advised him to think of something else, placed at his disposal his entire fortune, and recommended him to marry a stout Poitevine heiress, very pretty and good humored, who would make him an excellent wife. Then, as his farm was suffering by his absence, he returned to his province. Two months later, the judge of inquiry had resumed his ordinary avocations. But it was hard work. He went through his duties like a body without a soul. He felt that his heart was broken.

Once he ventured to pay a visit to his old friend, the marquise. On seeing him, she uttered a cry of terror.

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She took him for a spectre, so much was he changed in appearance.

As she dreaded dismal figures, she shut herself from him in the future.

Claire was sick for a week after seeing him. "How he loved me!" thought she. "He has almost died for me! Does Albert love me as much?"

She did not dare to answer herself. She felt a desire to console him, to speak to him, attempt something; but he came no more.

Daburon was not, however, a man to be overthrown without a struggle. He tried, as his father advised him, to distract his thoughts. He sought for pleasure, and found disgust, but not forgetfulness. Often he went so far as the threshold of dissipation; always the pure figure of Claire, dressed in white garments, barred the doors against him.

Then he took refuge in work, as in a sanctuary; condemned himself to the most incessant labor, forbade himself to think of Claire, as the consumptive forbids himself to recollect his malady.

His asperity in his labor, his feverish activity, was worth the reputation of an ambitious man; but he took no real interest in any thing.

At length, though he found not rest, this engrossing occupation exempted him from the sorrow which commonly follows a great catastrophe. The convalescence of oblivion commenced.

These were the events, recalled to Daburon by Père Tabaret, in pronouncing the name of Commarin. He believed them buried under the ashes of time; and behold they came up, as those characters traced in sympathetic ink appear when held before a fire, on paper apparently blank. In an instant they unrolled them-

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selves before his memory, with the instantaneousness of a dream, annihilating time and space.

During some minutes, he assisted at the representation of his own life. At once actor and spectator, he was there seated in his arm-chair; and he appeared to himself as in a theatre. He acted, and he judged himself.

His first thought, it must be confessed, was one of hate, followed by a detestable sentiment of satisfaction. Chance had delivered to him this man preferred by Claire,—this man no longer a haughty gentleman, illustrious by his fortune and his ancestors, but an illegitimate offspring of a *femme couvert*. To guard a stolen name, he had committed a most cowardly assassination. And he the judge, was to experience the infinite gratification of striking his enemy with the sword of justice.

But this was only a passing thought. The conscience of the man revolted against it, and made its powerful voice heard above the whispers of selfishness.

"Is any thing," it cried, "more monstrous than the association of these two ideas,—hatred and justice? A judge. Can he, without despising himself more than the vile beings he condemns, remind himself that a criminal whose fate is in his hands has been his enemy? A judge of inquiry. Has he a right to sit in judgment on a man against whom he harbors in his heart one drop of gall?"

Daburon repeated to himself many times during the year, on commencing an inquiry,—

"And I also,—I almost stained myself with dreadful murder!"

And now observe what he was about to do,—to arrest, interrogate, and hand over to the court of assize the man he had once the firm determination to kill.

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All the world, it is true, ignores the crime of thought and intention; but could he himself forget it? Was not this, of all others, a case to except against, to give his resignation? Ought he not to withdraw, and wash his hands of bloodshed, leaving to another the care of avenging society?

"No," said he, "it would be a cowardice unworthy of me."

A project of mad generosity came to him. "If I save him," murmured he, "if for sake of Claire I leave him his honor and his life,—but how can I save him?—I shall be obliged to suppress Père Tabaret's testimony, and impose upon him the complicity of silence. It will be necessary to make him voluntarily take a false road, and run with Gevrol after a chimerical murderer. Is this practicable? On the other hand, to spare Albert is to defame Noel; it is to assure impunity to the most odious of crimes. In fine, it is to sacrifice human justice to human feeling."

The magistrate suffered.

How to choose a path in the midst of so many perplexities! Dragged each way by different interests, he wavered, undecided, between determinations the most opposite, his mind oscillating from one extreme to the other.

What to do? His reason after this new and unforeseen shock vainly sought to regain its equilibrium.

"Retreat?" said he to himself. "Where, then, is my courage? Ought I not rather to remain the representative of the law, incapable of emotion, insensible to prejudice? Am I so feeble that, in assuming my rôle, I am unable to divest myself of my personality? Can I not, for the present, make abstraction of the past? My duty is to pursue this inquiry. Claire herself would order

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me to act thus. Would she desire to wed a man soiled by suspicion of a crime? Never. For Claire's sake, then, I will go on; that, if innocent, he may be restored to her, and, if guilty, she may be delivered from all further contact with a man so unworthy of her pure affection."

This was very strong reasoning; but, at the bottom of his heart, a thousand disquietudes darted their thorns. He wanted something more to reassure him.

"Do I still hate this young man?" he continued. "No, certainly. If Claire has preferred him to me, it is to Claire and not him I owe my suffering. My fury was no more than a passing fit of delirium. I will prove it. by letting him find in me as much of counsellor as judge. If he is not guilty, he will dispose of all this formidable array of evidence, placed by Père Tabaret in the hands of justice, by establishing counter-proofs of his innocence. Yes, I am able to be his judge. Heaven, who reads the thoughts of all hearts, sees that I love Claire enough to wish with all my heart the innocence of her lover."

At this moment, M. Daburon, remembered vaguely the lapse of time.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning.

"Goodness!" cried he, "and Père Tabaret is waiting for me. I shall find him asleep."

But Père Tabaret was not asleep. He had felt the passage of time no more than the judge.

Ten minutes had sufficed him to take an inventory of the contents of Daburon's study; which was large, and of a severe magnificence, altogether in accordance with the position and large fortune of the magistrate. Armed with a lamp, he approached six very handsome pictures, which broke the monotony of the wainscoting.

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and admired them. He examined curiously some rare bronzes, placed upon the chimney-piece, and a console. He gave the bookcase the glance of a connoisseur.

After which, taking an evening paper from the table, he approached the hearth, and plunged into a vast arm-chair.

He had not read the third part of the leading article, —which, like all the leading articles of the time, interested itself exclusively with the Roman question,— when, letting the paper drop from his hands he became absorbed in meditation. The fixed idea, stronger than his will, and more interesting to him than politics, carried him to Jonchère, where lay the murdered Widow Lerouge. Like the child who builds up and throws down again and again his house of cards, he re-arranged and scattered alternately his series of inductions and evidence.

Certainly there was nothing doubtful or questionable in the evidence. From A to Z, he knew all. He knew what his own impressions had been, on hearing Noel's revelations; and Daburon, he saw, shared his opinions. What difficulty remained?

There is between the judge of inquiry and the accused a supreme tribunal,—an admirable institution, a powerful moderator,—the jury.

The jury, thank heaven! does not content itself with a moral conviction. The strongest probabilities cannot draw from them an affirmative verdict.

Placed upon a neutral ground, between the prosecution and the defence, it demands material and tangible proofs. Where the magistrate would condemn twenty times for one, in all security of conscience, the jury acquit for lack of satisfying evidence.

The deplorable execution of Lesurques has certainly

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assured impunity to many criminals; but, it is necessary to say it justifies hesitation in receiving circumstantial evidence in capital crimes.

In short, save where a criminal is taken in the very act, or confesses his guilt, it is not certain that the minister of justice can secure a conviction. Sometimes the judge of inquiry is as anxious as the accused himself. Nearly all crimes are in some particular point mysterious, perhaps impenetrable to justice and the police; and the duty of the advocate is, to discover this weak point, and thereon establish his client's defence. By pointing out this doubt to the jury, he insinuates in their minds a distrust of the entire evidence; and frequently the detection of a distorted induction, cleverly exposed, can change the face of a prosecution, and make a strong case appear to the jury a weak one. This uncertainty explains the character of passion which is so often perceptible in criminal trials.

And, in proportion to the march of civilization, juries in important trials will become more timid and hesitating. The weight of responsibility oppresses the man of conscientious scruple. Already numbers recoil from the idea of capital punishment; and, whenever a jury can find a peg to hang a doubt on, they will wash their hands of the responsibility of condemnation. We have seen numbers of persons signing appeals for mercy to a condemned malefactor, condemned for what crime? Parricide! Every juror, from the moment he is sworn, weighs infinitely less the evidence he has come to listen to than the risk he runs of incurring the pangs of remorse. Rather than risk the condemnation of one innocent man, he will allow twenty scoundrels to go unpunished.

The accusation must, then, come before the jury,

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armed at all points, with both hands full of proofs. A task often tedious to the judge of inquiry, and bristling with difficulties, is the arrangement and condensation of this evidence, particularly when the accused is a miscreant of strength and coolness, certain of having left no traces of his guilt. Then, from the depths of his dungeon he defies the assault of justice, and laughs at the judge of inquiry. It is a terrible struggle, enough to make one tremble at the responsibility of the magistrate, when he remembers, that, after all, this man imprisoned, without consolation or advice, may be innocent. How hard is it, then, for the judge to resist his moral convictions!

Even when presumptive evidence points clearly to the criminal, and common sense recognizes him, Justice is at times compelled to acknowledge her defeat, for lack of what the jury consider sufficient proof of guilt.

Thus, unhappily, many crimes escape punishment. An old advocate-general one day confessed that he knew as many as three assassins, living rich, happy, and respected, who, unless from some improbable accidents, would end by dying in their beds, surrounded by their families, being followed to the grave with lamentations, and praised for their virtues in their epitaphs.

At the idea that a murderer should escape the penalty of his crime, steal himself away from the very court of assize, Père Tabaret's blood fairly boiled in his veins, as at the recollection of a cruel personal injury.

Such a monstrous event, in his opinion, could only proceed from the incapacity of the magistrates charged with the prosecution, the maladdress of the police, or the stupidity of the judge of inquiry.

"It is not I," he muttered, with the satisfied vanity of success, "who ever let my prey escape. No crime can

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be committed, of which the author cannot be found unless he happens to be a madman; in which event, his escape is reasonable. I would pass my life in pursuit of a criminal, before avowing myself vanquished, as this Gevrol has done so many times."

This time again, Père Tabaret, assisted by chance, had succeeded, he repeated to himself; but what proofs of innocence would the defence present to this accursed jury,—this jury, so difficult to convince, so formal and so cowardly. Who could imagine what means might not be found by a strong man, perfectly on his guard, covered by his position, and without doubt by cunning precautions? What trap had he prepared? To what new and infallible stratagem had he had recourse?

The amateur detective exhausted himself in subtle but impracticable combinations, always stopped by this fatal jury, so obnoxious to the chevaliers of the Rue Jerusalem.

He was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts that he did not hear the door open, and continued his reflections unconscious of the judge's presence.

Daburon's voice aroused him from his reverie.

"You will excuse me, M. Tabaret, for having left you so long alone."

The old fellow rose and made a respectful salutation at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"By my faith, monsieur," replied he, "I have not had the leisure to perceive my solitude."

Daburon crossed the room, and seated himself, facing his agent before a small table encumbered with papers and documents relating to the crime. He appeared very much fatigued.

"I have reflected a good deal," he commenced, "on all this affair—"

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"And I," interrupted Père Tabaret, "was just asking myself, monsieur, what was likely to be the attitude assumed by the viscount at the moment of his arrest. Nothing is more important, according to my theory, than his manner of conducting himself then. Will he attempt to intimidate the agents? Will he threaten them with expulsion from the house? These are generally the tactics of titled criminals. My opinion, however, is, that he will remain perfectly cool. This conclusion is logical. It is the character of the perpetrator of the crime to treat the ministers of justice with a superb assurance. He will declare himself the victim of a misunderstanding, and insist upon an immediate interview with the judge of inquiry. Once that is accorded to him, he will finish by explaining every thing very quickly."

The old fellow spoke of matters of speculation in such a tone of assurance that Daburon was unable to repress a smile.

"We have not got as far as that yet," said he.

"But we shall, in some hours," replied Tabaret quickly. "I presume you will order the criminal's arrest at daybreak."

The judge trembled, as the patient who sees the surgeon on entering deposit his case of instruments upon the table.

The moment for action had come. He felt now what a distance lies between a mental decision and the physical action resulting therefrom.

"You are prompt, M. Tabaret," said he; "you recognize no obstacles."

"None, having ascertained the criminal. Who else can have committed this assassination? Who but he had an interest in silencing the Widow Lerouge, in suppressing her testimony, in destroying her papers?

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Poor Noel! who is as dull as honesty, has been forestalled by this wretch, who stops at nothing. Noel has instituted proceedings to recover his title and estates. Should the guilt of the assassin fail to be established, he will remain de Cammarin more than ever; and my young advocate will be Noel Gerdy to the grave."

"Yes, but—"

The amateur fixed upon the judge a look of astonishment.

"You see, then, some difficulties, monsieur?" he demanded.

"Without doubt!" replied Daburon. "This is a matter demanding the utmost circumspection. In cases like the present, we must not strike until the blow is sure; and we have but presumptions. We must not deceive ourselves. Justice, unhappily, cannot repair her errors. Her hand once placed upon a man, even if unjustly, leaves an imprint of dishonor that can never be effaced. She may perceive her error, and proclaim it aloud; but in vain. Public opinion,—absurd, idiotic opinion,—pardons not the man guilty of the crime of being suspected."

It was with a sinking heart the old fellow heard these remarks. He would not be the man to be withheld by such mean considerations.

"Our suspicions are well grounded," continued the judge. "But, should they lead us into error, our precipitation would be a terrible misfortune for this young man, to say nothing of the effect it would have in abridging the authority and dignity of Justice, of weakening the respect which constitutes her power. Such a mistake would call for discussion, provoke examination, and awaken distrust, at an epoch in our history when

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all minds are but too much disposed to defy the constituted authorities."

He leaned upon the table, and appeared to reflect profoundly.

"No chance," thought Père Tabaret. "I have to do with a trembler. When he should act, he makes speeches; instead of signing mandates, he propounds theories. He is stunned by my discovery, and is not equal to the situation. Instead of being delighted by my appearance with the news of our success, he would have given a louis, I dare say, to have been left to slumber undisturbed in thick ignorance. Ah! he would very willingly have the little fishes in his net; but the big ones frighten him: the big fish are dangerous; and he lets them swim away."

"Perhaps," said Daburon in a loud tone, "it will suffice to issue a mandate of inquiry, and another of requisition for the appearance of the accused."

"Then all is lost!" cried Père Tabaret.

"And why, if you please?"

"Monsieur, we are opposed by a criminal of marked ability. The crime has been executed with the most subtle premeditation. A most providential accident alone, almost a miracle, has placed us upon the track of discovery. If we give him time to breathe, he will escape."

The only answer was an inclination of the head; which Daburon might have intended for a sign of assent.

"It is evident," continued the old fellow, "that our adversary has foreseen every thing, absolutely every thing, except the possibility of suspicion attaching to one in his high position. Oh! his precautions are all

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taken. If you are satisfied with demanding his appearance, he is saved. He will enter your cabinet of inquiry as tranquilly as your clerk, as unconcerned as if he came to arrange the preliminaries of a duel. He will present you with a magnificent *alibi*, an *alibi* that cannot be gainsaid. He will show you that he passed the evening and the night of Tuesday with personages of the highest rank. He has dined with the Count de Machin, gamed with the Marquis of so and so, and supped with the Duke of what's his name. The Baroness of this and the Viscountess of that have not lost sight of him for a minute. In short, his little machine will be so cleverly constructed, so nicely arranged, all its little wheels will play so well, that there will be nothing left for you but to open the door and usher him out with the most humble apologies. The only means of securing conviction is to surprise the miscreant by a rapidity against which it is impossible he can be on guard. Fall upon him like a thunderclap, arrest him as he awakes, drag him hither while yet pale with astonishment, and interrogate at once."

Père Tabaret stopped short, frightened at the idea that he had been wanting in respect; but Daburon showed no sign of being offended.

"Proceed," said he, in a tone of encouragement, "proceed."

"Then," continued the old fellow, "I am a judge of inquiry. I cause my man to be arrested; and, twenty minutes later, he is standing before me. I do not amuse myself by putting questions to him, more or less subtle. No, I go right to the mark. I overwhelm him at once by the weight of my certainty, prove to him so clearly that I know every thing, that he must surrender, seeing no chance of escape. I should say to him, 'My good

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man, you bring me an *alibi;* it is very well: but we are acquainted with this system of defence. It will not do with me. Of course I understand you have been elsewhere at the hour of the crime; an hundred persons have never lost sight of you: It is all admitted. In the mean time, here is what you have done. At twenty minutes after eight, you slipped away adroitly; at thirty-five minutes past eight, you took the train at Rue St. Lazare; at nine o'clock, you descended at the station at Rueil, and took the road to Jonchère; at a quarter past nine, you knocked at the window-shutter of the Widow Lerouge's cottage. You were admitted. You asked for something to eat, and, above all, something to drink. At twenty minutes past nine, you planted the end of a foil, well-sharpened, between her shoulders. You killed her! You then overturned every thing in the house, and burned certain papers of importance; after which, you tied in a napkin all the valuables you could find, and carried them off, to lead the police to believe the murder was the work of a robber. You locked the door, and threw away the key.

"'Arrived at the Seine you threw the bundle into the water, and then regained the railway station on foot; and, at eleven o'clock, you re-appeared in the company, where your absence was unnoticed. Your game was well played; but you omitted to provide against two adversaries, an agent of police, not easily deceived, named Tirauclair, and another still more capable, named chance.

"'Between the two, they have made you lose the game. Moreover, you were wrong to wear fine boots, and to keep on your pearl gray gloves, besides embarrassing yourself with a silk hat and an umbrella. Now confess your guilt, and save the trouble of a trial; and I will

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give you permission to smoke in your dungeon some of those trabucos you are so fond of, and which you smoke always with an amber mouthpiece.' "

During this speech, delivered with extraordinary volubility, Père Tabaret had gained a couple of inches in height, so great was his enthusiasm. He looked at the magistrate, as if requesting a smile of approval.

"Yes," continued he, after taking breath, "I would say this, and nothing else; and, unless this man is a hundred times stronger than I suppose him to be, unless he is made of bronze, of marble, or of steel, he would fall at my feet and avow his guilt."

"And then if he were of bronze," said Daburon, "and did not fall at your feet, what would you do next?"

The question evidently embarrassed the old fellow.

"Pshaw!" stammered he; "I don't know; I should see. I would search. But he would confess."

After a prolonged silence, Daburon took a pen, and wrote in haste —

"I surrender," said he. "M. Albert de Commarin shall be arrested. It is decided; but the formalities and inquiries will occupy some time, which I wish to use by first interrogating the Count de Commarin, the young man's father, and this young advocate, your friend M. Noel Gerdy, also, in examination of the letters of which you speak; they are indispensable to me."

At the name of Gerdy, Père Tabaret's face assumed a most comical expression of uneasiness.

"Confound it," cried he, "the very thing I have most dreaded."

"What?" demanded Daburon.

"The necessity for the examination of those letters. Noel will discover my interference. He will despise me: he will fly from me, when he knows that Tabaret and

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Tirauclair sleep in the same nightcap. Before eight days, my oldest friends will refuse to take my hand, as if it were not an honor to serve justice. I shall be obliged to change my residence, and assume a false name."

He almost wept, so great was his annoyance. Daburon was touched.

"Reassure yourself, my dear Tabaret," said he. "I will manage that your adopted son, your Benjamin, shall know nothing. I shall lead him to believe I have reached him by means of the widow's papers."

The old fellow seized the judge's hand in a transport of gratitude, and carried it to his lips.

"Oh! thanks, monsieur, a thousand thanks! I beg to be permitted to witness the arrest; and I shall be glad to assist at the examination."

"I expected you would ask it, M. Tabaret," answered the judge.

The lamps paled in the gray dawn of the morning; the rumbling of vehicles was heard in the distance: Paris was awaking.

"I have no time to lose," continued Daburon, "if I would have all my measures well taken. I must at once see the procurer imperial, awake him, if necessary. I will go from his house directly to the palace of justice. I shall be in my cabinet before eight o'clock; and I desire, M. Tabaret, you will there await my orders."

The magistrate's servant appeared.

"A note, monsieur," said he, "brought by a gendarme from Bougival. He waits an answer."

"Very well," replied Daburon. "Ask the man to have some refreshment; at least offer him a glass of wine."

He opened the envelope.

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"Ah!" he cried, "a letter from Gevrol;" and he read,—

"'To the Judge of Inquiry,—

"'I have the honor to inform you, that I am on the track of the man of the ear-rings. I heard of him at a wine shop, which he entered on Sunday morning, before going to the Widow Lerouge's cottage. He drank, and paid for two litres of wine; then, suddenly striking his forehead, he cried, "Old stupid! to forget that to-morrow is the boat's fête day!" and demanded another litre of wine. I consulted the almanac; it was the fête of St. Martin, which I therefore take to be the name of the boat. I have also learned that she was laden with grain. I write to the prefecture at the same time as I write to you, that inquiries may be made at Paris and Rouen. He must be found at one of these places.

"'I am in waiting, monsieur, etc.'"

"Poor Gevrol!" cried Père Tabaret, bursting with laughter. "He sharpens his sabre, and the battle is over. Are you not going to put a stop to his researches, monsieur?"

"No; certainly not," answered Daburon; "to neglect the slightest clew might lead to error. Who can tell what light we may receive from this old mariner with the rings in his ears?"

CHAPTER VIII.

On the same day that the crime of Jonchère was discovered, and precisely at the hour when Père Tabaret made his memorable examination in the victim's chamber, the Viscount Albert de Commarin entered a carriage, and proceeded to the Gate du Nord, to meet his father.

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The young man was very pale, his features pinched, his eyes dull, his lips blanched, his whole appearance denoting either overwhelming fatigue or unusual sorrow.

All the servants had observed, that, during the past five days, their young master was not in his ordinary condition: he spoke with effort, ate almost nothing, and forbade the admission of visitors.

His valet remarked that this singular alteration dated from the visit, on Sunday morning, of a certain M. Noel Gerdy, advocate, who had been closeted with him for three hours in the library.

The viscount, gay as a lark until the arrival of this person, had, from the moment of his departure, the appearance of a man at the point of death, or filled with remorse for the commission of a terrible crime.

At the moment of setting forth to meet his father, the viscount appeared to suffer so acutely that Lubin, his valet, entreated him not to expose himself to the cold; it would be more prudent to retire to his room, and call in the doctor.

But the Count de Commarin, his son knew, was exacting on the score of filial duty, and would overlook the worst of youthful indiscretions sooner than what he termed a want of reverence. He had announced his intended arrival by telegraph, twenty-four hours in advance; therefore the house was expected to be in perfect readiness to receive him: and the absence of Albert at the railway station would have been resented as a flagrant omission of duty.

The viscount had been but five minutes in the waiting room, when the bell announced the arrival of the train. Soon the doors leading to the platform were opened, and the depot became filled with travellers.

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The throng beginning to thin a little, the count appeared, followed by a servant, who carried a travelling pelisse lined with expensive fur.

The Count de Commarin looked a good ten years less than his age. His beard and hair, yet abundant, were scarcely grey. He was tall and muscular, held himself upright, and carried his head high,—all this without any of the ungracious British manner, so much affected by our young men of the present day. His appearance was noble, his movements easy. His hands were strong and handsome,—the hands of a man whose ancestors have been for centuries familiar with swordhilts. His regular features presented a study to the physiognomist, all expressing easy, careless good nature, even to the handsome, smiling mouth; except his eyes, in whose clear depths flashed the fiercest, most arrogant pride. This contrast revealed the secret of his character. Imbued quite as deeply with aristocratic prejudice as the Marquise d'Arlanges, he had progressed with his century, or at least appeared to have done so. As fully as the marquise, he held in contempt all who were not noble; but his disdain expressed itself in different fashion. The marquise proclaimed her contempt loudly and coarsely; the count dissimulated, beneath an excess of politeness humiliating to its object, a feeling of disgust equally excessive. The marquise willingly admitted her tradespeople to familiar conversation. The count, one day when his architect let fall his umbrella, picked it up and returned it to him. The marquise had lived with her eyes bandaged, her ears closed; the count had kept eyes and ears open and had seen and heard a good deal. She was stupid, and without the protection of common sense. He was witty and sensible, and possessed enlarged views of life and politics. She dreamed of the

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return of the absurd traditions of a former age, and the restoration of effete monarchies, imagining that the years could be turned back like the hands of a clock. He hoped for things within the power of events to bring forth. For example, he was sincerely persuaded the nobles of France would yet recover slowly and silently, but surely, all their lost power, with its prestige and influence.

But, in the end, they belonged to the same order. They were both aristocrats. The count was a flattered portrait of his class; the marquise its caricature.

It should be added that M. de Commarin knew how to divest himself of his crushing urbanity in the company of his equals. There he recovered his true character,—haughty, self-sufficient, and intractable, enduring contradiction pretty much as a wild horse the application of the spur.

In his own house, he was a despot.

Perceiving his father, Albert advanced, and embraced him with an air equally noble and ceremonious, and, in less than a minute, had expressed in well-chosen phrase all the news that had transpired during his absence, and the compliments of the journey.

Then only M. de Commarin perceived the so visible alteration in his son's face.

"You are not well, viscount?" asked he.

"Oh, yes, monsieur!" answered Albert, dryly.

The count gave an "Ah!" accompanied by a certain movement of the head—a habitual trick with him, expressing perfect incredulity; then, turning to his servant, he gave him some orders briefly.

"Now," resumed he, "let us go quickly to the house. I am in haste to feel at home; and I am hungry, having

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had nothing to-day but some detestable bouillon, at I know not what way station."

M. de Commarin arrived in Paris in very ill-humor: his journey into Austria had not brought the results he hoped for.

To crown his dissatisfaction, he had rested, on his homeward way, at the house of an old friend, with whom he had so violent a discussion that they parted without shaking hands.

The count was hardly seated in his carriage, which started at a gallop, before he entered upon the subject of this disagreement.

"I have quarrelled with the Duke de Sairmeuse," said he.

"That seems to me to happen whenever you meet," answered Albert, without intending any raillery.

"True," said the count; "but this is serious. I passed four days at his country-seat, in a state of inconceivable exasperation. He has been guilty of an act which lowers him in my estimation beyond recovery! Sairmeuse has sold his estate of Gondresy,—one of the finest in the north of France. He cut down the timber, and put up to auction the old chateau,—a princely dwelling, now to be converted into a sugar refinery; all this for the purpose, as he says, of raising money to meet some legal obligations,—debts or settlements, or something of that kind!"

"And was that the cause of your rupture?" inquired Albert, without much surprise.

"Certainly it was?" Do you not think it a sufficient one?"

"But, monsieur, you know the duke has a large family, and is far from rich."

"What matters that? A noble of France who sells

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his land commits an unworthy act. He is guilty of treason against his order!"

"O monsieur!" said Albert, deprecatingly.

"I said treason!" continued the count. "I maintain the position. Remember well, viscount, the power has been, and always will be, on the side of wealth,—the strongest right with those who hold the soil. The men of '93 well understood this principle, and acted upon it. By impoverishing the nobility, they destroyed their prestige more effectually than by abolishing their titles. A prince dismounted, and without retinue,—that is, without means to retain them,—is a ridiculous figure! The minister of July, who said to the people, 'Make yourselves rich,' was not a fool. He gave them the magic formula for power. But they have not the sense to understand it. They want to go too fast. They launch into speculations, and become rich, it is true; but in what? Stocks, bonds, paper,—rags, in short. It is smoke they are locking in their coffers. They prefer to invest in merchandise, which pays eight or ten per cent, to investing in vines or corn which will return but three. The peasant is not so foolish. From the moment he owns a piece of ground the size of a handkerchief, he wants to make it as large as a tablecloth. He is slow as the oxen he ploughs with, but as patient, as tenacious, and as obstinate. He goes directly to his object, pressing firmly against the yoke; and nothing can stop or turn him aside. He knows that stocks may rise or fall, fortunes be won or lost on 'change; but the land always remains,—the real standard of wealth. To become landholders, the peasant starves himself, wears sabots in winter; and the imbeciles who laugh at him will be astonished by and by when *he* makes his '93, and the peasant becomes a baron in power if not in name."

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"I do not understand the application," said the viscount.

"You do not understand? Why, what the peasant is doing is what the nobles ought to have done! Ruined, their duty was to reconstruct their fortunes. Commerce is interdicted to us; be it so: agriculture remains. Instead of grumbling uselessly during the half-century, instead of running themselves into debt, in the ridiculous attempt to support an appearance of grandeur, they ought to have retreated to their provinces, shut themselves up in their chateaux; there worked, economized, denied themselves, as the peasant is doing, purchased the land piece by piece. Had they taken this course, they would to-day possess France. Their wealth would be enormous; for the value of land rises year after year. I have, without effort, doubled my fortune in thirty years. Blauville, which cost my father a hundred crowns in 1817, is worth to-day more than a million: so that, when I hear the nobles complain, I shrug the shoulder. Who but they are to blame? They impoverish themselves from year to year. They sell their land to the peasants. Soon they will be reduced to beggary, and their escutcheons. What consoles me is, that the peasant, having become the proprietor of our domains, will then be all-powerful, and will yoke to his chariot wheels these traders in scrip and stocks, whom he hates as much as I execrate them myself."

The carriage at this moment stopped in the court of the Hotel Commarin, after having described that perfect circle, the glory of coachmen who preserve the old traditions.

The count alighted from the carriage, leaning upon his son's arm, and ascended the steps of the grand entrance.

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In the immense vestibule, nearly all the servants, dressed in rich liveries, stood in a line.

The count gave them a glance, in passing, as an officer might his soldiers on parade, and proceeded to his apartments upon the second floor, above the reception rooms.

Never was there a better regulated household than that of the Hotel de Commarin,—a considerable establishment, too; for the count's fortune enabled him to sustain a retinue greater than that of a German prince. He possessed in a high degree the art, more rare than is generally supposed, of commanding an army of servants.

According to Riviral, a man's manner of giving an order to a lackey establishes his rank better than a hundred genealogies on parchment.

The number of his domestics gave the count neither inconvenience nor embarrassment. They were necessary to him. Although he was exacting, never permitting the expression, "I did not understand," he was rarely heard to administer a reproof.

So perfect was the organization of this household, that its functions were performed like those of a machine,—without noise, variation, or effort.

Thus, when the count returned from his journey, the sleeping hotel was awakened as if by the spell of an enchanter. Each servant was at his post; and the occupations, interrupted during the past six weeks, resumed without confusion. As the count was known to have passed the day on the road, the dinner was served in advance of the usual hour. All the establishment, even to the lowest scullion, represented the spirit of the first article of the rules of the house, "Servants are not to execute orders, but anticipate them."

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M. de Commarin had hardly removed the traces of his journey, and changed his dress, when his Maitre d' Hotel announced,—

"M. le Count is served."

He descended at once; and father and son met upon the threshold of the dining-room.

This was a large apartment, very high in the ceiling, as were all the rooms of the first floor, and was at once magnificent and simple in its furniture and appointments.

One only of its four sideboards would have encumbered a dining-room of the Rue Malescherhes.

A collector of curiosities would have found much to occupy his attention on those four sideboards, loaded as they were with antique gold and silver plate, rare enamels, marvellous china, and porcelain that might make a king of Saxony turn green with jealousy.

The table service, resplendent in silver and cut glass, which occupied the middle of the room, was in keeping with this luxury.

The count was not only a great eater, but was vain of his enormous appetite,—the possession of which would have been to a poor devil an awful calamity. He was fond of recalling the names of great men, noted for their capacity of stomach. Charles the fifth devoured mountains of viands. Louis XIV. swallowed at each repast as much as six ordinary men. He argued, pleasantly, that we may judge of men's qualities by their digestive capacities. He compared them to lamps, whose power of giving light is in proportion to the oil they consume.

The first half hour of dinner passed in silence. M. de Commarin ate conscientiously, either not perceiving or not caring to notice that his son ate nothing, but merely

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sat at the table as if to countenance him. But with the dessert the old nobleman's ill-humor and volubility returned, apparently increased by the Burgundy, which he drank unsparingly.

He was partial, moreover, to after dinner argument, professing a theory that spirited discussion is a perfect digestive. A letter which had been delivered to him on his arrival, and which he had found time to glance over, gave him at once a subject and a point of departure.

"I arrived here at one o'clock," said he; "and I have already received a homily from Broisfresnay."

"He writes often," observed Albert.

"Too much; he consumes himself in ink. More ridiculous projects, vain hopes, veritable childishness! and he mentions at least a dozen names of men high in power as associates. By my word of honor, men seem to have lost their senses! They talk of lifting the world, only they want the lever and the point on which to rest it. It makes me die with laughter!"

For ten minutes the count continued to discharge a volley of epigrams and sarcasms against his best friends, without seeming to see that a great many of the foibles he ridiculed were his own as much as theirs.

"If," continued he more seriously,—"if they showed any confidence in themselves, they might be entitled to respect; but they have not even the virtue of courage. They count upon others to do for them what they ought to do for themselves. They are in continual quest of some one better mounted, who will consent to take them on his crupper. In short, their proceedings are a series of confessions of helplessness, of premature declarations of failure."

Coffee was served; and the count made a sign.

The servants left the room.

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"No," said the count, "I see but one hope for the French aristocracy, but one plank of salvation, one good little law, establishing the right of primogeniture."

"You will never obtain it, monsieur."

"You would oppose such a measure, viscount."

Albert knew by experience what dangerous ground his father was approaching, and was silent.

"Let us put it, then, that I dream of the impossible!" resumed the count. "Let the nobles do their duty. When the younger sons and daughters of great houses devote themselves to establish their families, by giving up the entire patrimony to its first-born for five generations, contenting themselves each one with a hundred louis a year, then only can great fortunes be reconstructed, and families, instead of being divided by a variety of interests, become united by a common aspiration,—have a political influence, a position in the State."

"Unfortunately," objected the viscount, "the time is not favorable to such devotedness."

"I know it, monsieur," replied the count quickly; "and in my own house I have proved it. I have conjured you to renounce the espousal of the granddaughter of this old fool, the Marquise d' Arlanges. To what purpose?"

"My father—" Albert was beginning.

"It is well," interrupted the count. "You will take your own course; but remember my prediction: you will give the mortal blow to our house; you will be one of the largest proprietors in France, but have half a dozen children; and they will be hardly rich. Live to be an old man, and you will see your grandchildren in poverty!"

"You put all at the worst, father."

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"Without doubt: it is the only means of pointing out the danger, and averting the evil. You talk of your life's happiness. A truly noble man thinks of his name and family before all, even his life's happiness. Mademoiselle d' Arlanges is very pretty, and very attractive; but she has not a sou. It is your duty to marry an heiress."

"Whom I shall not love?"

"The same old song. Pshaw! the lady I wish you to marry will bring you four millions in her apron,—a larger dowry than the kings of to-day can give their daughters."

The discussion upon this subject would have been interminable, had Albert taken an active share in it; but his mind was leagues away: and he answered from time to time only, and then in monosyllables. This absence of opposition was more irritating to the count than the most obstinate contradiction. He directed his utmost efforts to pique his son, that was his next tactique.

Meanwhile, he was vainly prodigal of words, and unsparing in provoking and unpleasant allusions. At length, from being irritated, he became furious; and, on receiving a laconic response, he burst forth,—

"Parbleu! the son of my Maitre d' Hotel argues no worse than you. What blood have you in your veins? You are more like a son of the people than a scion of the de Commarins!"

There are certain conditions of mind in which the least conversation jars upon the nerves. During the last half hour, Albert had suffered an intolerable punishment. The patience with which he had armed himself at last escaped him.

"Well, monsieur," he answered, "if I resemble a son of the people, there are perhaps good reasons for it."

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The glance accompanying the speech was so expressive that the count experienced a sudden shock. All the animation departed from his manner; and, in a hesitating voice, he demanded,—

"What do you say, viscount?"

Albert no sooner uttered the sentence than he regretted his precipitation; but he had gone too far to retreat.

"Monsieur," he said with a peculiar calmness, "I have to confer with you on important matters. My honor, yours, the honor of our house, are involved. I intended postponing the conversation till to-morrow, not desiring to trouble you on the evening of your return; but you have introduced the topic, and we must proceed."

The count listened with ill-concealed anxiety. He divined the misfortune that had occurred, and was terrified at himself for having divined it.

"Believe me, monsieur," continued Albert, "whatever may have been your acts, my voice will never be raised to reproach you. Your constant goodness—"

M. de Commarin held up his hand.

"A truce to preambles; the facts without phrases," said he, sternly.

Albert was slow to answer: he hesitated where to commence.

"Monsieur," said he at length, "during your absence, I have read all your correspondence with Madame Gerdy,—*all!*" emphasizing the last word, already so significant.

The count started up, as if stung by a serpent, with such violence that his chair rolled back several paces.

"Not a word!" cried he in a terrible voice. "I forbid you to speak."

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He was ashamed of his violence, evidently; for he replaced his chair with an affectation of calmness.

"Who will hereafter refuse to believe in presentiments?" he resumed in a tone which he strove to render light and rallying. "An hour ago, on seeing your pale face at the railway station, I felt that you had learned something,—much or little,—of this history. I was sure of it."

With one accord, father and son avoided letting their eyes meet, lest they might encounter glances too eloquent to bear at so painful a moment.

"You said, monsieur," said the count, "honor demands this conference; it is important, then, to avoid delay. Will you follow me to my room?"

He rang the bell. A valet appeared.

"Neither M. the viscount nor I am at home to any one, no matter whom. We are not to be interrupted."

CHAPTER IX.

THIS revelation irritated, much more than surprised the Comte de Commarin.

Indeed, for twenty years, he had been expecting to see the truth brought to light. He knew that there could be no secret so carefully guarded that it might not by some chance escape; and his had been known to four people, three of whom were still living.

He had not forgotten that he had been imprudent enough to trust this secret to paper, knowing all the while that it ought never to have been written.

How could he, a prudent diplomat, a statesman, used to precaution, have put it in writing? How, after writing, could he have allowed this fatal correspondence to

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remain in existence? Why had he not destroyed, at whatever cost, these overwhelming proofs, which sooner or later, would be brought against him? Such imprudence could only have been caused by an absurd passion, blind, insensible, improvident even to madness.

It is characteristic of love to have such belief in its continuance that it is scarcely satisfied with the prospect of eternity. Absorbed completely in the present, it takes no thought for the future.

Besides, what man ever dreams of putting himself on his guard against the woman he loves? The enamored Samson is ever ready to submit his hair to the scissors of his Delilah.

So long as he was Valerie's lover, the count never thought of asking the return of his letters from his beloved accomplice. If the idea had occurred to him, he would have repelled it as an insult to the character of his angel.

What reason could he have had to suspect her discretion? None. He would have been much more likely to have supposed her interested in removing every trace, even the slightest, of the occurrences which had taken place. Was it not her son who had received the benefits of the deed,—who had usurped another's name and fortune?

When, eight years after, thinking himself deceived, the count had broken off the connection which had given him so much happiness, he thought of obtaining possession of this unhappy correspondence. But he knew no way. A thousand reasons precluded his moving in the matter.

The principal one of these reasons was, that he had resolved never again to meet this woman. once so dearly loved. He did not feel sufficiently sure either of his

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anger or of his firmness. Could he, without yielding, resist the tearful pleading of those eyes, which had so long held complete sway over his soul?

To look again upon this mistress of his youth would, he feared, result in his forgiving her; and he had been too cruelly wounded in his pride and in his affection to admit the idea of a reconciliation.

On the other hand, to obtain the letters through a third party was entirely out of the question. He abstained, then, from all action, postponing it indefinitely.

"I will go to her," said he; "but not until I have so torn her from my heart that she will have become indifferent to me. I will not gratify her with the sight of my grief."

So months and years passed on; and finally he began to say and believe that it was too late.

The truth was, that there were memories which it would have been imprudent to awake. By an unjust mistrust, he might provoke her to using the letters.

Can you better force a well-armed person to use his arms than by demanding their surrender? After so long a silence, to ask for the letters would be nearly the same as declaring war. Besides, were they still in existence? who could tell? what more likely than that Madame Gerdy had destroyed them, understanding that their existence was dangerous and that their destruction alone could render her son's usurpation safe?

M. de Commarin was not blind; but, finding himself in an inextricable difficulty, he thought the wisest course was to trust to chance; and so he left open for his old age this door to a guest who was always entering,—Unhappiness.

And for now more than twenty years, he had never passed a day without cursing his inexcusable folly.

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Never had he been able to forget that above his head hung a danger more terrible than the sword of Damocles, suspended by a thread, which the slightest accident might break.

To-day this thread had broken.

Often, when considering the possibility of such a catastrophe, he had asked himself how he should avert it?

He had formed and rejected many plans; he had deluded himself, like all men of imagination, who, with a wealth of chimerical projects, find themselves at last surprised while unprepared.

Albert stood respectfully, while his father sat in his great armorial chair, just beneath the large chart, where the genealogical tree of the illustrious family of Rheteau de Commarin spread its luxuriant branches.

The old gentleman permitted no one to see the cruel apprehensions which oppressed him. He seemed neither irritated nor dejected; but his eyes expressed a haughtiness more than usually disdainful,—a self-reliance full of contempt, rendering him imperturbable.

"Now, viscount," he began in a firm voice, "explain yourself. I need say nothing to you of the pain of a father, obliged to blush before his son; you feel, and pity. Let us spare each other, and try to be calm. Tell me, how did you obtain your knowledge of this correspondence?"

Albert had had time to recover himself, and prepare for the present struggle, as he had waited four days for this interview with mortal impatience.

The difficulty he experienced in speaking the first words had given place to a dignified and proud demeanor. He expressed himself clearly and forcibly,

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without losing himself in those details which in grave matters only retard progress.

"Monsieur," he replied, "on Monday morning a young man appeared here, stating that he had business with me of the utmost importance and secrecy. I received him. He then revealed to me that I, alas! am only your natural son, substituted, through your affection, for the legitimate child borne to you by Madame de Commarin."

"And you did not kick this man out of doors?" exclaimed the count.

"No, monsieur. I should have answered him very sharply, of course; but, presenting me with a package of letters, he begged me to read them before replying."

"Ah!" cried M. de Commarin, "you did not throw them in the fire,—there was a fire, I suppose? You held them in your hands; and they still exist. I would have done very differently!"

"Monsieur!" said Albert, reproachfully.

And recalling the position Noel had occupied before the mantel, and the manner in which he stood, he added,—

"Even if the thought had occurred to me, it was impracticable. Besides, at the first glance, I recognized your handwriting. I then took the letters, and read them."

"And then?"

"And then, monsieur, I returned the correspondence to the young man, and asked for a delay of eight days; not to think over it myself,—there was no need of that,—but because I judged an interview with you indispensable. Now, therefore, I beseech you, tell me whether this substitution ever took place."

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"Certainly it did," replied the count violently,—"certainly. You know that it did; for you have read what I wrote to Madame Gerdy, your mother."

Albert had foreseen, had expected this reply; but it crushed him.

This was one of those misfortunes, so great, that you have to keep repeating it to yourself before you can actually realize it. This flinching lasted but an instant, however.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he replied. "I believed it; but I had not a formal assurance of it. All the letters that I read spoke distinctly of your purpose, detailing your plan minutely; but not one pointed to, or in any way confirmed, the execution of the project."

The count gazed at his son with a look of intense surprise. He recollected distinctly all the letters; and he could remember, that, in writing to Valerie, he had over and over rejoiced at their success, thanking her for having acted in accordance with his wishes.

"You did not finish, then, viscount," he said, "you did not read all?"

"Every line, monsieur, and with an attention that you may well understand. The last letter shown me simply announced to Madame Gerdy the arrival of Claudine Lerouge, the nurse who was charged with accomplishing the exchange. I know nothing beyond that."

"These proofs amount to nothing," muttered the count. "A man may form a plan, cherish it for a long time, and at the last moment abandon it; it often happens so."

He reproached himself for having answered so hastily. Albert had had only serious suspicions: he had changed them to certainty. What a mistake!

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"There can be no possible doubt," he said to himself; "Valerie has destroyed the most conclusive letters, those which appeared to her the most dangerous, those I wrote after the exchange. But why has she preserved these others, compromising enough in themselves? and why, after having preserved them, has she let them out of her possession?"

"Perhaps she is dead!" said M. de Commarin aloud.

And at this thought of Valerie dead, without his having again seen her, he started painfully. His heart, after more than twenty years of voluntary separation, still suffered, so deeply rooted was this first love of his youth. He had cursed her; at this moment, he would have pardoned her. She had deceived him, it is true; but did he not owe to her the only years of happiness he had ever known? Had she not formed all the poetry of his youth. Had he experienced, since leaving her, one single hour of happiness? In his present frame of mind, his heart retained only happy memories, like a vase which, once filled with the precious perfumes, retains the odor even after it is itself destroyed.

"Poor girl!" he murmured.

He sighed deeply. Three or four times his eyelids twinkled, as if a tear had nearly fallen. Albert watched him with anxious curiosity. This was the first time since the viscount had grown to man's estate that he had surprised in his father's countenance other emotion than ambition or pride, conquered or triumphant. But M. de Commarin's was not the character to yield long to sentiment.

"You have not told me, viscount," he said, "who sent you this unhappy message?"

"He came in person, monsieur, not wishing, he told me, to bring a third party into the sad affair. The young

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man was no other than he whose place I have occupied, —your legitimate son, Noel Gerdy himself."

"Yes," said the count in a low tone, "Noel; that is his name: I remember." And then, with evident hesitation, he added, "did he speak to you of his—of your mother?"

"Scarcely, monsieur. He told me that he had been brought up in ignorance of the secret which he had accidentally discovered, and which he revealed to me."

M. de Commarin made no reply. There was nothing more for him to learn. He was reflecting. The decisive moment had come; and he saw but one way to escape.

"Come Viscount," he said, in a tone so affectionate that Albert was astonished, "do not stand; sit down here by me, and let us discuss this matter. Let us unite our efforts to shun, if possible, this great misfortune. Confide in me, as a son should in his father. Have you thought of what is to be done? have you formed any determination?"

"It seems to me, monsieur, that hesitation is impossible."

"In what way?"

"My duty, father, to me is very plain. Before your legitimate son, I ought to give way without a murmur, if not without regret. Let him come. I am ready to yield to him every thing that I have so long, without a suspicion of the truth, kept from him,—a father's love, his fortune and his name."

The old gentleman, at this most praiseworthy reply. could scarcely preserve the calmness he had recommended to his son in the earlier part of the interview. His face grew purple; and he struck the table with his fist more furiously than he had ever done in his life. He, usually so guarded, so decorous on all occasions, ut-

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tered a volley of oaths that would not have done discredit to an old cavalry officer.

"And I tell you, sir, that this, your dream of life, shall never take place. No; that it sha'n't. I promise you, whatever happens, understand, that things must remain as they are; because it is my wish. You are Viscount de Commarin; and Viscount de Commarin you shall remain, in spite of yourself. You shall retain the title to your death, or at least to mine; for never, while I live, shall your absurd idea be carried out."

"But, monsieur," began Albert, timidly.

"You are very fond of interrupting me while I am speaking, monsieur," exclaimed the count. "Do I not know all your objections beforehand? You are going to tell me that it is a revolting injustice, a wicked robbery. I confess it, and grieve over it more than you possibly can. Do you think that I now for the first time repent of my youthful folly? For twenty years, monsieur, I have lamented my true son; for twenty years have I cursed the wickedness of which he is the victim. And yet I taught myself to keep silence, to hide the sorrow and the remorse which has covered my pillow with thorns. In a single instant, your senseless yielding would render my long-suffering of no avail. No, I will never permit it!"

The count read a reply on his son's lips; he stopped him with a withering glance.

"Do you think," he continued, "that I have never wept over the thought of my legitimate son passing his life struggling for a competence? Do you think that I have never felt a burning desire to repair the wrong done him? There have been times, monsieur, when I would have given half of my fortune simply to embrace that child of a wife too tardily appreciated. The fear

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of casting a shadow of suspicion upon your birth prevented me. I have sacrificed myself to the great name I bear. I received it from my ancestors without a stain. May you hand it down to your children equally spotless! Your first purpose is a worthy one,—noble, chivalrous, but you must forget it. Think of the scandal, if our secret should be disclosed to the public gaze. Can you not foresee the joy of that herd of parvenues who surround us? I shudder at the thought of the odium, the ridicule which will attach to our name. Too many families already have stains upon their escutcheons; I hope ours will never be among the number."

M. de Commarin had stopped several minutes, without Albert's daring to reply, so much had he been accustomed since infancy to respect the least wish of the terrible old gentleman.

"There is no possible way out of it," continued the count. "Shall I to-morrow discard you, and present this Noel as my son, saying, 'Excuse me, but there has been a slight mistake in identity: I didn't know my own son?' And then the tribunals will get hold of it. Now, if our name were Benoit, Durand, or Bernard, it would make no difference; but, when one is called a Commarin, even but for a single day, he must retain it through life. Justice is not the same in every case; because all have not the same duties. In our position, errors are irreparable. Take courage, then, and show yourself worthy of the name you bear. The storm is upon you; raise your head to meet it."

Albert's impassibility contributed not a little to increase M. de Commarin's irritation. Firm in an unchangeable resolution, the viscount listened like one fulfilling a duty; and his face reflected no emotion. The count saw that he was not shaken.

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"What have you to reply?" he asked.

"It seems to me, monsieur, that you do not understand all the dangers to which I am exposed. It is difficult to master the revolts of conscience."

"Indeed!" interrupted the count contemptuously; "your conscience revolts, does it? It has chosen its time badly. Your scruples come too late. So long as you saw, in succeeding me, an illustrious title and a dozen or so of millions, it smiled on you. To-day the name appears to you laden with a heavy fault,—a crime, if you will; and your conscience revolts. Renounce this folly. Children, monsieur, are accountable to their fathers; and they should obey them. Willing or unwilling, you must be my accomplice; willing or unwilling, you must bear the burden, as I have borne it. And, however much you suffer, be assured it can never approach what I have endured for so many years."

"Ah, monsieur!" cried Albert, "is it then I, the dispossessor, who has made this trouble? is it not, on the contrary, the dispossessed? It is not I who have moved in the matter; it is Noel Gerdy."

"Noel!" repeated the count.

"Your legitimate son, yes, monsieur. You act as if the issue of this unhappy affair depended solely upon my will. Do you, then, imagine that Noel Gerdy will be so easily disposed of, so easily silenced? And, if he should raise his voice, do you hope to accomplish much through the considerations you have just mentioned?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Then you are wrong, monsieur, permit me to tell you. Suppose for a moment that this young man has ever had a soul sufficiently noble to relinquish his claim

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upon your rank and your fortune. Is there not now the accumulated rancor of years to urge him to oppose us? He cannot help feeling a fierce resentment for the horrible injustice of which he has been the victim. He must passionately long for vengeance, or rather reparation."

"He has no proofs."

"He has your letters, monsieur."

"They are not decisive, you have told me."

"That is true, monsieur; and yet they convinced me, who am interested in not being convinced. Besides if he needs witnesses, he will find them."

"Who? You, probably."

"Yourself, monsieur. The day when he wishes it, you will betray us. Suppose you were summoned before the tribunals, and that there, under oath, you should be required to speak the truth, what answer would you make?"

M. de Commarin's face darkened at this very natural supposition. He hesitated,—he whose honor was usually so great.

"I would save the name of my ancestors," he said at last.

Albert shook his head doubtfully.

"At the price of a lie, my father," he said. "I never will believe that. But let us suppose even that. He will then call upon Madame Gerdy."

"Oh, I will answer for her!" cried the count; "her interests are the same as ours. If necessary, I will see her. Yes," he added with an effort, "I will go to her house: I will speak to her; and I will guarantee that she does not betray us."

"And Claudine," continued the young man; "will she be silent, too?"

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"For money, yes; and I will give her whatever she asks."

"And you would trust, father, to a paid silence, as if one could ever be sure of a purchased conscience? What is sold to you may be sold to another. A certain sum may close her mouth; a much larger will open it."

"I will risk it."

"You forget, father, that Claudine Lerouge was Noel Gerdy's nurse, that she takes an interest in his happiness, that she loves him. How do you know that he has not already secured her aid? She lives at Bougival. I have been there, I remember, with you. Without doubt, he sees her often. Perhaps it was she who put him on the track of this correspondence. He spoke to me of her, as though he was sure of her testimony. He almost proposed my going to her for information."

"Alas!" cried the count, "why is not Claudine dead instead of my faithful Germain?"

"You see, monsieur," concluded Albert, "Claudine Lerouge alone stands in the way of your project."

"Ah, no!" cried the count; "I will find some expedient."

The obstinate old gentleman was not willing to give in to this argument, whose very clearness blinded him. The pride of his blood paralyzed in him his usual practical good sense, and obscured his remarkable clear headedness. To acknowledge himself conquered by necessity humiliated him, seemed to him disgraceful, unworthy of him. He did not remember to have met during his long career an invincible resistance or an absolute impediment.

He was a little like those Hercules, who, having never experienced a limit to their strength, believe that they could overcome mountains if they desired.

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He had also the misfortune of all men of imagination, who fall in love with their projects, and who try to make them succeed on all occasions, as if wishing hard was all that was necessary to change their dreams into realities.

Albert this time broke the silence, whose length threatened to be prolonged.

"I see, monsieur," he said, "that you fear, above all things, the publicity of this sad history; the possible scandal renders you desperate. But, unless we yield, the uproar will be terrible. If a writ issued against us to-morrow; in four days our trial will be the talk of all Europe. The newspapers will print the facts, accompanied by heaven knows what comments of their own. Our name, however the trial results, will appear in all the papers of the world. This might be borne, if we were sure of succeeding; but we might fail, my father, —we might fail. Then think of the noise, think of the dishonor branded upon us in public opinion."

"I think," said the count, "that you can have neither respect nor affection for me, when you speak in that way."

"It is my duty, monsieur, to point out to you the evils I see threatening, and which there is yet time to shun. Noel Gerdy is your legitimate son; recognize him, acknowledge his just pretensions, receive him. We can make the change very quickly It is easy to account for it, through a mistake of the nurse,—Claudine Lerouge, for instance. All the parties being in accord, there can be no trouble made. What is to prevent the new Viscount de Commarin from quitting Paris, and being lost to sight? He might travel in Europe four or five years; by the end of that time all would be forgotten. No one will remember me more."

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M. de Commarin was not listening: he was deep in thought.

"But instead of contesting, viscount," he cried, "we might compromise. We may be able to purchase these letters. What does this young fellow want? A position and a fortune? I will give him both. I will make him as rich as he can ask. I will give him a million; if need be, two, three,—half of all I possess. With money, you see, much money—"

"Spare him, monsieur; he is your son."

"Curse it! and I wish him to the devil for it! I will show him that he had better compromise. I will prove to him the bad policy of the earthen pot beating against the iron kettle; and, if he is not a fool, he will understand it."

The count rubbed his hands while speaking. He was delighted with this brilliant plan of negotiation. It could not fail to result favorably. A crowd of arguments occurred to his mind for proving his case. He would buy back again his lost quiet.

But Albert did not seem to share his father's hopes.

"You will perhaps think it unkind in me, monsieur," said he sadly, "to dispel this last illusion of yours; but it must be. Do not delude yourself with the idea of an amicable arrangement: the awakening will only be the more painful. I have seen this Gerdy, my father; and he is not one, I assure you, to be intimidated. If ever there was an energetic will in the world, his is one. He is truly your son; and his expression, like yours, shows an iron resolution, to be broken but never bent. I can still hear his voice trembling with resentment, while he spoke to me. I can still see the dark fire of his eyes. No: he will never compromise. He will have all or nothing; and I cannot say that he is wrong. If we re-

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