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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

A few weeks after the date of the preceding chapter, a gay party of men were assembled at supper in one of the private salons of the Maison Doree. The supper was given by Frederic Lemercier, and the guests were, though in various ways, more or less distinguished. Rank and fashion were not unworthily represented by Alain de Rochebriant and Enguerrand de Vandemar, by whose supremacy as "lion" Frederic still felt rather humbled, though Alain had contrived to bring them familiarly together. Art, Literature, and the Bourse had also their representatives in Henri Bernard, a rising young portrait-painter, whom the Emperor honoured with his patronage, the Vicomte de Braze, and M. Savarin. Science was not altogether forgotten, but contributed its agreeable delegate in the person of the eminent physician to whom we have been before introduced, --Dr. Bacourt. Doctors in Paris are not so serious as they mostly are in London; and Bacourt, a pleasant philosopher of the school of Aristippus, was no unfrequent nor ungenial guest at any banquet in which the Graces relaxed their zones. Martial glory was also represented at that social gathering by a warrior, bronzed and decorated, lately arrived from Algiers, on which arid soil he had achieved many laurels and the rank of Colonel. Finance contributed Duplessis. Well it might; for Duplessis had just assisted the host to a splendid coup at the Bourse.

"Ah, _cher_ Monsieur Savarin," says Enguerrand de Vandemar, whose patrician blood is so pure from revolutionary taint that he is always instinctively polite, "what a masterpiece in its way is that little paper of yours in the 'Sens Commun,' upon the connection between the national character and the national diet! so genuinely witty!--for wit is but truth made amusing."

"You flatter me," replied Savarin, modestly; "but I own I do think there is a smattering of philosophy in that trifle. Perhaps, however, the character of a people depends more on its drinks than its food. The wines of Italy, heady, irritable, ruinous to the digestion, contribute to the character which belongs to active brains and disordered livers. The Italians conceive great plans, but they cannot digest them. The English common-people drink beer, and the beerish character is stolid, rude, but stubborn and enduring. The English middle-class imbibe port and sherry; and with these strong potations their ideas become obfuscated. Their character has no liveliness; amusement is not one of their wants; they sit at home after dinner and doze away the fumes of their beverage in the dulness of domesticity. If the English aristocracy are more vivacious and cosmopolitan, it is thanks to the wines of France, which it is the mode with them to prefer; but still, like all plagiarists, they are

imitators, not inventors; they borrow our wines and copy our manners.
The Germans--"

"Insolent barbarians!" growled the French Colonel, twirling his mustache;
"if the Emperor were not in his dotage, their Sadowa would ere this have
cost them their Rhine."

"The Germans," resumed Savarin, unheeding the interruption, "drink acrid
wines, varied with beer, to which last their commonalty owes a quasi
resemblance in stupidity and endurance to the English masses. Acrid
wines rot the teeth Germans are afflicted with toothache from infancy.
All people subject to toothache are sentimental. Goethe was a martyr
to toothache. 'Werther' was written in one of those paroxysms which
predispose genius to suicide. But the German character is not all
toothache; beer and tobacco step in to the relief of Rhenish acridities,
blend philosophy with sentiment, and give that patience in detail which
distinguishes their professors and their generals. Besides, the German
wines in themselves have other qualities than that of acidity. Taken
with sourkrot and stewed prunes, they produce fumes of self-conceit.
A German has little of French vanity; he has German self-esteem. He
extends the esteem of self to those around him; his home, his village,
his city, his country,--all belong to him. It is a duty he owes to
himself to defend them. Give him his pipe and his sabre, and, Monsieur
le Colonel, believe me, you will never take the Rhine from him."

"P-r-r," cried the Colonel; "but we have had the Rhine."

"We did not keep it. And I should not say I had a francpiece if I
borrowed it from your purse and had to give it back the next day."

Here there arose a very general hubbub of voices, all raised against M.
Savarin. Enguerrand, like a man of good ton, hastened to change the
conversation.

"Let us leave these poor wretches to their sour wines and toothaches. We
drinkers of the champagne, all our own, have only pity for the rest of
the human race. This new journal 'Le Sens Commun' has a strange title,
Monsieur Savarin."

"Yes; 'Le Sens Commun' is not common in Paris, where we all have too much
genius for a thing so vulgar."

"Pray," said the young painter, "tell me what you mean by the title 'Le
Sens Commun.' It is mysterious."

"True," said Savarin; "it may mean the *_Sensus communis_* of the Latins,
or the Good Sense of the English. The Latin phrase signifies the sense
of the common interest; the English phrase, the sense which persons of
understanding have in common. I suppose the inventor of our title meant
the latter signification."

"And who was the inventor?" asked Bacourt.

"That is a secret which I do not know myself," answered Savarin.

"I guess," said Enguerrand, "that it must be the same person who writes the political leaders. They are most remarkable; for they are so unlike the articles in other journals, whether those journals be the best or the worst. For my own part, I trouble my head very little about politics, and shrug my shoulders at essays which reduce the government of flesh and blood into mathematical problems. But these articles seem to be written by a man of the world, and as a man of the world myself, I read them."

"But," said the Vicomte de Breze, who piqued himself on the polish of his style, "they are certainly not the composition of any eminent writer. No eloquence, no sentiment; though I ought not to speak disparagingly of a fellow-contributor."

"All that may be very true;" said Savarin; "but M. Enguerrand is right. The papers are evidently the work of a man of the world, and it is for that reason that they have startled the public, and established the success of 'Le Sens Commun.' But wait a week or two longer, Messieurs, and then tell me what you think of a new roman by a new writer, which we shall announce in our impression to-morrow. I shall be disappointed, indeed, if that does not charm you. No lack of eloquence and sentiment there."

"I am rather tired of eloquence and sentiment," said Enguerrand. "Your editor, Gustave Rameau, sickens me of them with his 'Starlit Meditations in the Streets of Paris,' morbid imitations of Heine's enigmatical 'Evening Songs.' Your journal would be perfect if you could suppress the editor."

"Suppress Gustave Rameau!" cried Bernard, the painter; "I adore his poems, full of heart for poor suffering humanity."

"Suffering humanity so far as it is packed up in himself," said the physician, dryly,--"and a great deal of the suffering is bile. But a propos of your new journal, Savarin, there is a paragraph in it to-day which excites my curiosity. It says that the Vicomte de Mauleon has arrived in Paris, after many years of foreign travel; and then, referring modestly enough to the reputation for talent which he had acquired in early youth, proceeds to indulge in a prophecy of the future political career of a man who, if he have a grain of sens common, must think that the less said about him the better. I remember him well; a terrible mauvais sujet, but superbly handsome. There was a shocking story about the jewels of a foreign duchess, which obliged him to leave Paris."

"But," said Savarin, "the paragraph you refer to hints that that story is a groundless calumny, and that the true reason for De Mauleon's voluntary self-exile was a very common one among young Parisians,--he had lavished away his fortune. He returns, when, either by heritage or his own exertions, he has secured elsewhere a competence."

"Nevertheless I cannot think that society will receive him," said

Bacourt. "When he left Paris, there was one joyous sigh of relief among all men who wished to avoid duels, and keep their wives out of temptation. Society may welcome back a lost sheep, but not a reinvigorated wolf."

"I beg your pardon, *_mon cher_*," said Enguerrand; "society has already opened its fold to this poor ill-treated wolf. Two days ago Louvier summoned to his house the surviving relations or connections of De Mauleon--among whom are the Marquis de Rochebriant, the Counts de Passy, De Beauvilliers, De Chavigny, my father, and of course his two sons--and submitted to us the proofs which completely clear the Vicomte de Mauleon of even a suspicion of fraud or dishonour in the affair of the jewels. The proofs include the written attestation of the Duke himself, and letters from that nobleman after De Mauleon's disappearance from Paris, expressive of great esteem, and indeed, of great admiration, for the Vicomte's sense of honour and generosity of character. The result of this family council was that we all went in a body to call on De Mauleon; and he dined with my father that same day. You know enough of the Comte de Vandemar, and, I may add, of my mother, to be sure that they are both, in their several ways, too regardful of social conventions to lend their countenance even to a relation without well weighing the pros and cons. And as for Raoul, Bayard himself could not be a greater stickler on the point of honour."

This declaration was followed by a silence that had the character of stupor.

At last Duplessis said, "But what has Louvier to do in this galere? Louvier is no relation of that well-born *_vaurien_*; why should he summon your family council?"

"Louvier excused his interference on the ground of early and intimate friendship with De Mauleon, who, he said, came to consult him on arriving at Paris, and who felt too proud or too timid to address relations with whom he had long dropped all intercourse. An intermediary was required, and Louvier volunteered to take that part on himself; nothing more natural nor more simple. By the way, Alain, you dine with Louvier to-morrow, do you not?--a dinner in honour of our rehabilitated kinsman. I and Raoul go."

"Yes, I shall be charmed to meet again a man who, whatever might be his errors in youth, on which," added Alain, slightly colouring, "it certainly does not become me to be severe, must have suffered the most poignant anguish a man of honour can undergo,--namely, honour suspected; and who now, whether by years or sorrow, is so changed that I cannot recognize a likeness to the character I have just heard given to him as *_mauvais sujet_* and *_vaurien_*."

"Bravo!" cried Enguerrand; "all honour to courage!--and at Paris it requires great courage to defend the absent."

"Nay," answered Alain, in a low voice. "The *_gentilhomme_* who will not defend another *_gentilhomme_* traduced, would, as a soldier, betray a

citadel and desert a flag."

"You say M. de Mauleon is changed," said De Breze; "yes, he must be growing old. No trace left of his good looks?"

"Pardon me," said Enguerrand; "he is *_bien conserve_*, and has still a very handsome head and an imposing presence. But one cannot help doubting whether he deserved the formidable reputation he acquired in youth; his manner is so singularly mild and gentle, his conversation so winningly modest, so void of pretence, and his mode of life is as simple as that of a Spanish *hidalgo*."

"He does not, then, affect the role of Monte Cristo," said Duplessis, "and buy himself into notice like that hero of romance?"

"Certainly not: he says very frankly that he has but a very small income, but more than enough for his wants,--richer than in his youth, for he has learned content. We may dismiss the hint in 'Le Sens Commun' about his future political career,--at least he evinces no such ambition."

"How could he as a Legitimist?" said Alain, bitterly. "What department would elect him?"

"But is he a Legitimist?" asked De Breze.

"I take it for granted that he must be that," answered Alain, haughtily, "for he is a De Mauleon."

"His father was as good a De Mauleon as himself, I presume," rejoined De Breze, dryly; "and he enjoyed a place at the Court of Louis Philippe, which a Legitimist could scarcely accept. Victor did not, I fancy, trouble his head about politics at all, at the time I remember him; but to judge by his chief associates, and the notice he received from the Princes of the House of Orleans, I should guess that he had no predilections in favour of Henri V."

"I should regret to think so," said Alain, yet more haughtily, "since the De Mauleons acknowledge the head of their house in the representative of the Rochebriants."

"At all events," said Duplessis, "M. de Mauleon appears to be a philosopher of rare stamp. A Parisian who has known riches and is contented to be poor is a phenomenon I should like to study."

"You have that chance to-morrow evening, Monsieur Duplessis," said Enguerrand.

"What! at M. Louvier's dinner? Nay, I have no other acquaintance with M. Louvier than that of the Bourse, and the acquaintance is not cordial."

"I did not mean at M. Louvier's dinner, but at the Duchesse de Tarascon's ball. You, as one of her special favourites, will doubtless honour her *_reunion_*."

"Yes; I have promised my daughter to go to the ball. But the Duchesse is Imperialist. M. de Mauleon seems to be either a Legitimist, according to Monsieur le Marquis, or an Orleanist, according to our friend De Breze."

"What of that? Can there be a more loyal Bourbonite than De Rochebriant?--and he goes to the ball. It is given out of the season, in celebration of a family marriage. And the Duchesse de Tarascon is connected with Alain, and therefore with De Mauleon, though but distantly."

"Ah! excuse my ignorance of genealogy."

"As if the genealogy of noble names were not the history of France," muttered Alain, indignantly.

CHAPTER II.

Yes, the "Sens Commun" was a success: it had made a sensation at starting; the sensation was on the increase. It is difficult for an Englishman to comprehend the full influence of a successful journal at Paris; the station--political, literary, social--which it confers on the contributors who effect the success. M. Lebeau had shown much more sagacity in selecting Gustave Rameau for the nominal editor than Savarin supposed or my reader might detect. In the first place, Gustave himself, with all his defects of information and solidity of intellect, was not without real genius,--and a sort of genius that when kept in restraint, and its field confined to sentiment or sarcasm, was in unison with the temper of the day; in the second place, it was only through Gustave that Lebeau could have got at Savarin, and the names which that brilliant writer had secured at the outset would have sufficed to draw attention to the earliest numbers of the "Sens Commun," despite a title which did not seem alluring. But these names alone could not have sufficed to circulate the new journal to the extent it had already reached. This was due to the curiosity excited by leading articles of a style new to the Parisian public, and of which the authorship defied conjecture. They were signed Pierre Firmin,--supposed to be a *_nom de plume_*, as, that name was utterly unknown in the world of letters. They affected the tone of an impartial observer; they neither espoused nor attacked any particular party; they laid down no abstract doctrines of government. But somehow or other, in language terse yet familiar, sometimes careless yet never vulgar, they expressed a prevailing sentiment of uneasy discontent, a foreboding of some destined change in things established, without defining the nature of such change, without saying whether it would be for good or for evil. In his criticisms upon individuals, the writer was guarded and moderate--the keenest-eyed censor of the press could not have found a pretext for interference with expression of opinions so polite. Of the Emperor these articles spoke little, but that little was not disrespectful; yet, day after day, the articles contributed to sap the Empire. All malcontents of every shade

comprehended, as by a secret of freemasonry, that in this journal they had an ally. Against religion not a word was uttered, yet the enemies of religion bought that journal; still, the friends of religion bought it too, for those articles treated with irony the philosophers on paper who thought that their contradictory crotchets could fuse themselves into any single Utopia, or that any social edifice, hurriedly run up by the crazy few, could become a permanent habitation for the turbulent many, without the clamps of a creed.

The tone of these articles always corresponded with the title of the journal,--"Common-sense." It was to common-sense that it appealed,-- appealed in the utterance of a man who disdained the subtle theories, the vehement declamation, the credulous beliefs, or the inflated bombast, which constitute so large a portion of the Parisian press. The articles rather resembled certain organs of the English press, which profess to be blinded by no enthusiasm for anybody or anything, which find their sale in that sympathy with ill-nature to which Huet ascribes the popularity of Tacitus, and, always quietly undermining institutions with a covert sneer, never pretend to a spirit of imagination so at variance with common-sense as a conjecture how the institutions should be rebuilt or replaced.

Well, somehow or other the journal, as I was saying, hit the taste of the Parisian public. It intimated, with the easy grace of an unpremeditated agreeable talker, that French society in all its classes was rotten; and each class was willing to believe that all the others were rotten, and agreed that unless the others were reformed, there was something very unsound in itself.

The ball at the Duchesse de Tarascon's was a brilliant event. The summer was far advanced; many of the Parisian holiday-makers had returned to the capital, but the season had not commenced, and a ball at that time of year was a very unwonted event. But there was a special occasion for this fete,--a marriage between a niece of the Duchesse and the son of a great official in high favour at the Imperial Court.

The dinner at Louvier's broke up early, and the music for the second waltz was sounding when Enguerrand, Alain, and the Vicomte de Mauleon ascended the stairs. Raoul did not accompany them; he went very rarely to any balls,--never to one given by an Imperialist, however nearly related to him the Imperialist might be. But in the sweet indulgence of his good-nature, he had no blame for those who did go,--not for Enguerrand, still less, of course, for Alain.

Something too might well here be said as to his feeling towards Victor de Mauleon. He had joined in the family acquittal of that kinsman as to the grave charge of the jewels; the proofs of innocence thereon seemed to him unequivocal and decisive, therefore he had called on the Vicomte and acquiesced in all formal civilities shown to him. But such acts of justice to a fellow-gentilhomme and a kinsman duly performed, he desired to see as little as possible of the Vicomte de Mauleon. He reasoned thus: "Of every charge which society made against this man he is guiltless; but of all the claims to admiration which society accorded to

him before it erroneously condemned, there are none which make me covet his friendship, or suffice to dispel doubts as to what he may be when society once more receives him. And the man is so captivating that I should dread his influence over myself did I see much of him."

Raoul kept his reasonings to himself, for he had that sort of charity which indisposes an amiable man to be severe on bygone offences. In the eyes of Enguerrand and Alain, and such young votaries of the mode as they could influence, Victor de Mauleon assumed almost heroic proportions. In the affair which had inflicted on him a calumny so odious, it was clear that he had acted with chivalrous delicacy of honour. And the turbulence and recklessness of his earlier years, redeemed as they were, in the traditions of his contemporaries, by courage and generosity, were not offences to which young Frenchmen are inclined to be harsh. All question as to the mode in which his life might have been passed during his long absence from the capital was merged in the respect due to the only facts known, and these were clearly proved in his pieces justificatives: First, that he had served under another name in the ranks of the army in Algiers; had distinguished himself there for signal valour, and received, with promotion, the decoration of the cross. His real name was known only to his colonel, and on quitting the service, the colonel placed in his hands a letter of warm eulogy on his conduct, and identifying him as Victor de Mauleon. Secondly, that in California he had saved a wealthy family from midnight murder, fighting single-handed against and overmastering three ruffians, and declining all other reward from those he had preserved than a written attestation of their gratitude. In all countries, valour ranks high in the list of virtues; in no country does it so absolve from vices as it does in France.

But as yet Victor de Mauleon's vindication was only known by a few, and those belonging to the gayer circles of life. How he might be judged by the sober middle class, which constitutes the most important section of public opinion to a candidate for political trusts and distinctions, was another question.

The Duchesse stood at the door to receive her visitors. Duplessis was seated near the entrance, by the side of a distinguished member of the Imperial Government, with whom he was carrying on a whispered conversation. The eye of the financier, however, turned towards the doorway as Alain and Enguerrand entered, and passing over their familiar faces, fixed itself attentively on that of a much older man whom Enguerrand was presenting to the Duchesse, and in whom Duplessis rightly divined the Vicomte de Mauleon. Certainly if no one could have recognized M. Lebeau in the stately personage who had visited Louvier, still less could one who had heard of the wild feats of the *roi des viveurs* in his youth reconcile belief in such tales with the quiet modesty of mien which distinguished the cavalier now replying, with bended head and subdued accents, to the courteous welcome of the brilliant hostess. But for such difference in attributes between the past and the present De Mauleon, Duplessis had been prepared by the conversation at the Maison Doree. And now, as the Vicomte, yielding his place by the Duchesse to some new-comer, glided on, and, leaning against a column, contemplated the gay scene before him with that expression of

countenance, half sarcastic, half mournful, with which men regard, after long estrangement, the scenes of departed joys, Duplessis felt that no change in that man had impaired the force of character which had made him the hero of reckless coevals. Though wearing no beard, not even a mustache, there was something emphatically masculine in the contour of the close-shaven cheek and resolute jaw; in a forehead broad at the temples, and protuberant in those organs over the eyebrows which are said to be significant of quick perception and ready action; in the lips, when in repose compressed, perhaps somewhat stern in their expression, but pliant and mobile when speaking, and wonderfully fascinating when they smiled. Altogether, about this Victor de Mauleon there was a nameless distinction, apart from that of conventional elegance. You would have said, "That is a man of some marked individuality, an eminence of some kind in himself." You would not be surprised to hear that he was a party-leader, a skilled diplomatist, a daring soldier, an adventurous traveller; but you would not guess him to be a student, an author, an artist.

While Duplessis thus observed the Vicomte de Mauleon, all the while seeming to lend an attentive ear to the whispered voice of the Minister by his side, Alain passed on into the ball-room. He was fresh enough to feel the exhilaration of the dance. Enguerrand (who had survived that excitement, and who habitually deserted any assembly at an early hour for the cigar and whist of his club) had made his way to De Mauleon, and there stationed himself. The lion of one generation has always a mixed feeling of curiosity and respect for the lion of a generation before him, and the young Vandemar had conceived a strong and almost an affectionate interest in this disrowned king of that realm in fashion which, once lost, is never to be regained; for it is only Youth that can hold its sceptre and command its subjects.

"In this crowd, Vicomte," said Enguerrand, "there must be many old acquaintances of yours?"

"Perhaps so, but as yet I have only seen new faces."

As he thus spoke, a middle-aged man, decorated with the grand cross of the Legion and half-a-dozen foreign orders, lending his arm to a lady of the same age radiant in diamonds, passed by towards the ball-room, and in some sudden swerve of his person, occasioned by a pause of his companion to adjust her train, he accidentally brushed against De Mauleon, whom he had not before noticed. Turning round to apologize for his awkwardness, he encountered the full gaze of the Vicomte, started, changed countenance, and hurried on his companion.

"Do you not recognize his Excellency?" said Enguerrand, smiling. "His cannot be a new face to you."

"Is it the Baron de Lacy?" asked De Mauleon.

"The Baron de Lacy, now Comte d'Epinau, ambassador at the Court of ----, and, if report speak true, likely soon to exchange that post for the _porte feuille_ of Minister."

"He has got on in life since I saw him last, the little Baron. He was then my devoted imitator, and I was not proud of the imitation."

"He has got on by always clinging to the skirts of some one stronger than himself,--to yours, I dare say, when, being a *_parvenu_* despite his usurped title of baron, he aspired to the entree into clubs and salons. The entree thus obtained, the rest followed easily; he became a millionaire through a wife's dot, and an ambassador through the wife's lover, who is a power in the State."

"But he must have substance in himself. Empty bags can not be made to stand upright. Ah! unless I mistake, I see some one I knew better. You pale, thin man, also with the grand cross--surely that is Alfred Hennequin. Is he too a decorated Imperialist? I left him a socialistic Republican."

"But, I presume, even then an eloquent avocat. He got into the Chamber, spoke well, defended the *_coup-d'etat_*. He has just been made *_Prefet_* of the great department of the a popular appointment. He bears a high character. Pray renew your acquaintance with him; he is coming this way."

"Will so grave a dignitary renew acquaintance with me? I doubt it."

But as De Mauleon said this, he moved from the column, and advanced towards the Prefet. Enguerrand followed him, and saw the Vicomte extend his hand to his old acquaintance.

The Prefet stared, and said, with frigid courtesy, "Pardon me,--some mistake."

"Allow me, Monsieur Hennequin," said Enguerrand, interposing, and wishing good-naturedly to save De Mauleon the awkwardness of introducing himself,--"allow me to reintroduce you to my kinsman, whom the lapse of years may well excuse you for forgetting, the Vicomte de Mauleon."

Still the Prefet did not accept the hand. He bowed with formal ceremony, said, "I was not aware that Monsieur le Vicomte had returned to Paris," and moving to the doorway, made his salutation to the hostess and disappeared.

"The insolent!" muttered Enguerrand.

"Hush!" said De Mauleon, quietly, "I can fight no more duels,--especially with a Prefet. But I own I am weak enough to feel hurt at such a reception from Hennequin, for he owed me some obligations,--small, perhaps, but still they were such as might have made me select him, rather than Louvier, as the vindicator of my name, had I known him to be so high placed. But a man who has raised himself into an authority may well be excused for forgetting a friend whose character needs defence. I forgive him."

There was something pathetic in the Vicomte's tone which touched Enguerrand's warm if light heart. But De Mauleon did not allow him time to answer. He went on quickly through an opening in the gay crowd, which immediately closed behind him, and Enguerrand saw him no more that evening.

Duplessis ere this had quitted his seat by the Minister, drawn thence by a young and very pretty girl resigned to his charge by a cavalier with whom she had been dancing. She was the only daughter of Duplessis, and he valued her even more than the millions he had made at the Bourse. "The Princess," she said, "has been swept off in the train of some German Royalty; so, *_petit pere_*, I must impose myself on thee."

The Princess, a Russian of high rank, was the *_chaperon_* that evening of Mademoiselle Valerie Duplessis.

"And I suppose I must take thee back into the ballroom," said the financier, smiling proudly, "and find thee partners."

"I don't want your aid for that, Monsieur; except this quadrille, my list is pretty well filled up."

"And I hope the partners will be pleasant. Let me know who they are," he whispered, as they threaded their way into the ball-room.

The girl glanced at her tablet.

"Well, the first on the list is milord somebody, with an unpronounceable English name."

"Beau cavalier?"

"No; ugly, old too; thirty at least."

Duplessis felt relieved. He did not wish his daughter to fall in love with an Englishman.

"And the next?"

"The next?" she said hesitatingly, and he observed that a soft blush accompanied the hesitation.

"Yes, the next. Not English too?"

"Oh, no; the Marquis de Rochebriant."

"Ah! who presented him to thee?"

"Thy friend, *_petit pere_*, M. de Braze."

Duplessis again glanced at his daughter's face; it was bent over her bouquet.

"Is he ugly also?"

"Ugly!" exclaimed the girl, indignantly; "why, he is--" she checked herself and turned away her head.

Duplessis became thoughtful. He was glad that he had accompanied his child into the ball-room; he would stay there, and keep watch on her and Rochebriant also.

Up to that moment he had felt a dislike to Rochebriant. That young noble's too obvious pride of race had nettled him, not the less that the financier himself was vain of his ancestry. Perhaps he still disliked Alain, but the dislike was now accompanied with a certain, not hostile, interest; and if he became connected with the race, the pride in it might grow contagious.

They had not been long in the ball-room before Alain came up to claim his promised partner. In saluting Duplessis, his manner was the same as usual, not more cordial, not less ceremoniously distant. A man so able as the financier cannot be without quick knowledge of the human heart.

"If disposed to fall in love with Valerie," thought Duplessis, "he would have taken more pains to please her father. Well, thank heaven, there are better matches to be found for her than a noble without fortune and a Legitimist without career."

In fact, Alain felt no more for Valerie than for any other pretty girl in the room. In talking with the Vicomte de Braze in the intervals of the dance, he had made some passing remark on her beauty. De Braze had said, "Yes, she is charming; I will present you," and hastened to do so before Rochebriant even learned her name. So introduced, he could but invite her to give him her first disengaged dance, and when that was fixed, he had retired, without entering into conversation.

Now, as they took their places in the quadrille, he felt that effort of speech had become a duty, if not a pleasure; and of course, he began with the first commonplace which presented itself to his mind.

"Do you not think it a very pleasant ball, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes," dropped, in almost inaudible reply, from Valerie's rosy lips.

"And not over-crowded, as most balls are?"

Valerie's lips again moved, but this time quite inaudibly. The obligations of the figure now caused a pause. Alain racked his brains and began,

"They tell me the last season was more than usually gay; of that I cannot judge, for it was well-nigh over when I came to Paris for the first time."

Valerie looked up with a more animated expression than her childlike face

had yet shown, and said, this time distinctly, "This is my first ball, Monsieur le Marquis."

"One has only to look at Mademoiselle to divine that fact," replied Alain, gallantly.

Again the conversation was interrupted by the dance; but the ice between the two was now broken; and when the quadrille was concluded, and Rochebriant led the fair Valerie back to her father's side, she felt as if she had been listening to the music of the spheres, and that the music had now suddenly stopped. Alain, alas for her! was under no such pleasing illusion. Her talk had seemed to him artless indeed, but very insipid, compared with the brilliant conversation of the wedded Parisiennes with whom he more habitually danced; and it was with rather a sensation of relief that he made his parting bow, and receded into the crowd of bystanders.

Meanwhile De Mauleon had quitted the assemblage, walking slowly through the deserted streets towards his apartment. The civilities he had met at Louvier's dinner-party, and the marked distinction paid to him by kinsmen of rank and position so unequivocal as Alain and Enguerrand, had softened his mood and cheered his spirits. He had begun to question himself whether a fair opening to his political ambition was really forbidden to him under the existent order of things, whether it necessitated the employment of such dangerous tools as those to which anger and despair had reconciled his intellect. But the pointed way in which he had been shunned or slighted by the two men who belonged to political life--two men who in youth had looked up to himself, and whose dazzling career of honours was identified with the Imperial system--reanimated his fiercer passions and his more perilous designs. The frigid accost of Hennequin more especially galled him; it wounded not only his pride but his heart; it had the venom of ingratitude, and it is the peculiar privilege of ingratitude to wound hearts that have learned to harden themselves to the hate or contempt of men to whom no services have been rendered. In some private affair concerning his property, De Mauleon had had occasion to consult Hennequin, then a rising young avocat. Out of that consultation a friendship had sprung up, despite the differing habits and social grades of the two men. One day, calling on Hennequin, he found him in a state of great nervous excitement. The avocat had received a public insult in the salon of a noble, to whom De Mauleon had introduced him, from a man who pretended to the hand of a young lady to whom Hennequin was attached, and indeed almost affianced. The man was a notorious _spadassin_,--a duellist little less renowned for skill in all weapons than De Mauleon himself. The affair had been such that Hennequin's friends assured him he had no choice but to challenge this bravo. Hennequin, brave enough at the bar, was no hero before sword-point or pistol. He was utterly ignorant of the use of either weapon; his death in the encounter with an antagonist so formidable seemed to him certain, and life was so precious,--an honourable and distinguished career opening before him, marriage with the woman he loved. Still he had the Frenchman's point of honour. He had been told that he must fight; well, then, he must. He asked De Mauleon to be one of his seconds, and in asking him, sank in his chair, covered his face with his hands, and burst

into tears.

"Wait till to-morrow," said De Mauleon; "take no step till then. Meanwhile, you are in my hands, and I answer for your honour."

On leaving Hennequin, Victor sought the _spadassin_ at the club of which they were both members, and contrived, without reference to Hennequin, to pick a quarrel with him. A challenge ensued; a duel with swords took place the next morning. De Mauleon disarmed and wounded his antagonist, not gravely, but sufficiently to terminate the encounter. He assisted to convey the wounded man to his apartment, and planted himself by his bedside, as if he were a friend.

"Why on earth did you fasten a quarrel on me?" asked the spadassin; "and why, having done so, did you spare my life; for your sword was at my heart when you shifted its point, and pierced my shoulder?"

"I will tell you, and in so doing, beg you to accept my friendship hereafter, on one condition. In the course of the day, write or dictate a few civil words of apology to M. Hennequin. Ma foi! every one will praise you for a generosity so becoming in a man who has given such proofs of courage and skill to an avocat who has never handled a sword nor fired a pistol."

That same day De Mauleon remitted to Hennequin an apology for heated words freely retracted, which satisfied all his friends. For the service thus rendered by De Mauleon, Hennequin declared himself everlastingly indebted. In fact, he entirely owed to that friend his life, his marriage, his honour, his career.

"And now," thought De Mauleon, "now, when he could so easily requite me, --now he will not even take my hand. Is human nature itself at war with me?"

CHAPTER III.

Nothing could be simpler than the apartment of the Vicomte de Mauleon, in the second story of a quiet old-fashioned street. It had been furnished at small cost out of his savings. Yet, on the whole, it evinced the good taste of a man who had once been among the exquisites of the polite world. You felt that you were in the apartment of a gentleman, and a gentleman of somewhat severe tastes, and of sober matured years. He was sitting the next morning in the room which he used as a private study. Along the walls were arranged dwarf bookcases, as yet occupied by few books, most of them books of reference, others cheap editions of the French classics in prose--no poets, no romance-writers, with a few Latin authors also in prose,--Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus. He was engaged at his desk writing,--a book with its leaves open before him, "Paul Louis Courier," that model of political irony and masculine style of composition. There was a ring at his door-bell. The Vicomte kept no

servant. He rose and answered the summons. He recoiled a few paces on recognizing his visitor in M. Hennequin.

The Prefet this time did not withdraw his hand; he extended it, but it was with a certain awkwardness and timidity. "I thought it my duty to call on you, Vicomte, thus early, having already seen M. Enguerrand de Vandemar. He has shown me the copies of the pieces which were inspected by your distinguished kinsmen, and which completely clear you of the charge that--grant me your pardon when I say--seemed to me still to remain unanswered when I had the honour to meet you last night."

"It appears to me, Monsieur Hennequin, that you, as an avocat so eminent, might have convinced yourself very readily of that fact."

"Monsieur le Vicomte, I was in Switzerland with my wife at the time of the unfortunate affair in which you were involved."

"But when you returned to Paris, you might perhaps have deigned to make inquiries so affecting the honour of one you had called a friend, and for whom you had professed"--De Mauleon paused; he disdained to add--"an eternal gratitude."

Hennequin coloured slightly, but replied with self-possession.

"I certainly did inquire. I did hear that the charge against you with regard to the abstraction of the jewels was withdrawn, that you were therefore acquitted by law; but I heard also that society did not acquit you, and that, finding this, you had quitted France. Pardon me again, no one would listen to me when I attempted to speak on your behalf but now that so many years have elapsed, that the story is imperfectly remembered, that relations so high-placed receive you so cordially,--now I rejoice to think that you will have no difficulty in regaining a social position never really lost, but for a time resigned."

"I am duly sensible of the friendly joy you express. I was reading the other day in a lively author some pleasant remarks on the effects of medisance or calumny upon our impressionable Parisian public. 'If,' says the writer, 'I found myself accused of having put the two towers of Notre Dame into my waistcoat-pocket I should not dream of defending myself; I should take to flight. And,' adds the writer, 'if my best friend were under the same accusation, I should be so afraid of being considered his accomplice that I should put my best friend outside the door.' Perhaps, Monsieur Hennequin, I was seized with the first alarm. Why should I blame you if seized with the second? Happily, this good city of Paris has its reactions. And you can now offer me your hand. Paris has by this time discovered that the two towers of Notre Dame are not in my pocket."

There was a pause. De Mauleon had resettled himself at his desk, bending over his papers, and his manner seemed to imply that he considered the conversation at an end.

But a pang of shame, of remorse, of tender remembrance, shot across the

heart of the decorous, worldly, self-seeking man, who owed all that he now was to the _ci-devant vaurien_ before him. Again he stretched forth his hand, and this time grasped De Mauleon's warmly. "Forgive me," he said, feelingly and hoarsely; "forgive me, I was to blame. By character, and perhaps by the necessities of my career, I am over-timid to public opinion, public scandal. Forgive me. Say if in anything now I can requite, though but slightly, the service I owe you."

De Mauleon looked steadily at the Prefet, and said slowly, "Would you serve me in turn? Are you sincere?"

The Prefet hesitated a moment, then answered firmly, "Yes."

"Well, then, what I ask of you is a frank opinion,--not as lawyer, not as Prefet, but as a man who knows the present state of French society. Give that opinion without respect to my feelings one way or other. Let it emanate solely from your practised judgment."

"Be it so," said Hennequin, wondering what was to come. De Mauleon resumed, "As you may remember, during my former career I had no political ambition. I did not meddle with politics. In the troubled times that immediately succeeded the fall of Louis Philippe I was but an epicurean looker-on. Grant that, so far as admission to the salons is concerned, I shall encounter no difficulty in regaining position; but as regards the Chamber, public life, a political career, can I have my fair opening under the Empire? You pause. Answer as you have promised, frankly."

"The difficulties in the way of a political career would be very great."

"Insuperable?"

"I fear so. Of course, in my capacity of _Prefet_, I have no small influence in my department in support of a Government candidate. But I do not think that the Imperial Government could, at this time especially, in which it must be very cautious in selecting its candidates, be induced to recommend you. The affair of the jewels would be raked up; your vindication disputed, denied; the fact that for so many years you have acquiesced in that charge without taking steps to refute it; your antecedents, even apart from that charge; your present want of property (M. Enguerrand tells me your income is but moderate); the absence of all previous repute in public life. No; relinquish the idea of political contest,--it would expose you to inevitable mortifications, to a failure that would even jeopardize the admission to the salons which you are now gaining. You could not be a Government candidate."

"Granted. I may have no desire to be one; but an opposition candidate, one of the Liberal party?"

"As an Imperialist," said Hennequin, smiling gravely, "and holding the office I do, it would not become me to encourage a candidate against the Emperor's Government. But speaking with the frankness you solicit, I should say that your chances there are infinitely worse. The Opposition are in a pitiful minority,--the most eminent of the Liberals can scarcely

gain seats for themselves; great local popularity or property, high established repute for established patriotism, or proved talents of oratory and statesmanship, are essential qualifications for a seat in the Opposition; and even these do not suffice for a third of the persons who possess them. Be again what you were before,--the hero of salons remote from the turbulent vulgarity of politics."

"I am answered. Thank you once more. The service I rendered you once is requited now."

"No, indeed,--no; but will you dine with me quietly today, and allow me to present to you my wife and two children, born since we parted? I say to-day, for to-morrow I return to my _Prefecture_."

"I am infinitely obliged by your invitation, but to-day I dine with the Comte de Beauvilliers to meet some of the _Corps Diplomatique_. I must make good my place in the salons, since you so clearly show me that I have no chance of one in the Legislature--unless--"

"Unless what?"

"Unless there happen one of those revolutions in which the scum comes uppermost."

"No fear of that. The subterranean barracks and railway have ended forever the rise of the scum, the reign of the _canaille_ and its barricades."

"Adieu, my dear Hennequin. My respectful _hommages a Madame_."

After that day the writing of Pierre Firmin in "Le Sens Commun," though still keeping within the pale of the law, became more decidedly hostile to the Imperial system, still without committing their author to any definite programme of the sort of government that should succeed it.

CHAPTER IV.

The weeks glided on. Isaura's manuscript had passed into print; it came out in the French fashion of _feuilletons_,--a small detachment at a time. A previous flourish of trumpets by Savarin and the clique at his command insured it attention, if not from the general public, at least from critical and literary coteries. Before the fourth instalment appeared it had outgrown the patronage of the coteries; it seized hold of the public. It was not in the last school in fashion; incidents were not crowded and violent,--they were few and simple, rather appertaining to an elder school, in which poetry of sentiment and grace of diction prevailed. That very resemblance to old favourites gave it the attraction of novelty. In a word, it excited a pleased admiration, and great curiosity was felt as to the authorship. When it oozed out that it was by the young lady whose future success in the musical world had been

so sanguinely predicted by all who had heard her sing, the interest wonderfully increased. Petitions to be introduced to her acquaintance were showered upon Savarin. Before she scarcely realized her dawning fame, she was drawn from her quiet home and retired habits; she was *_fete_* and courted in the literary circle of which Savarin was a chief. That circle touched, on one side, Bohemia; on the other, that realm of politer fashion which, in every intellectual metropolis, but especially in Paris, seeks to gain borrowed light from luminaries in art and letters. But the very admiration she obtained somewhat depressed, somewhat troubled her; after all, it did not differ from that which was at her command as a singer.

On the one hand, she shrank instinctively from the caresses of female authors and the familiar greetings of male authors, who frankly lived in philosophical disdain of the conventions respected by sober, decorous mortals. On the other hand, in the civilities of those who, while they courted a rising celebrity, still held their habitual existence apart from the artistic world, there was a certain air of condescension, of patronage, towards the young stranger with no other protector but Signora Venosta, the *_ci-devant_* public singer, and who had made her *_debut_* in a journal edited by M. Gustave Rameau, which, however disguised by exaggerated terms of praise, wounded her pride of woman in flattering her vanity as author. Among this latter set were wealthy, high-born men, who addressed her as woman--as woman beautiful and young--with words of gallantry that implied love, but certainly no thought of marriage,--many of the most ardent were indeed married already. But once launched into the thick of Parisian hospitalities, it was difficult to draw back. The Venosta wept at the thought of missing some lively soiree, and Savarin laughed at her shrinking fastidiousness as that of a child's ignorance of the world. But still she had her mornings to herself; and in those mornings, devoted to the continuance of her work (for the commencement was in print before a third was completed), she forgot the commonplace world that received her in the evenings. Insensibly to herself the tone of this work had changed as it proceeded. It had begun seriously indeed, but in the seriousness there was a certain latent joy. It might be the joy of having found vent of utterance; it might be rather a joy still more latent, inspired by the remembrance of Graham's words and looks, and by the thought that she had renounced all idea of the professional career which he had evidently disapproved. Life then seemed to her a bright possession. We have seen that she had begun her *_roman_* without planning how it should end. She had, however, then meant it to end, somehow or other, happily. Now the lustre had gone from life; the tone of the work was saddened; it foreboded a tragic close. But for the general reader it became, with every chapter, still more interesting; the poor child had a singularly musical gift of style,--a music which lent itself naturally to pathos. Every very young writer knows how his work, if one of feeling, will colour itself from the views of some truth in his innermost self; and in proportion as it does so, how his absorption in the work increases, till it becomes part and parcel of his own mind and heart. The presence of a hidden sorrow may change the fate of the beings he has created, and guide to the grave those whom, in a happier vein, he would have united at the altar. It is not till a later stage of experience and art that the writer escapes from the influence of his individual

personality, and lives in existences that take no colourings from his own. Genius usually must pass through the subjective process before it gains the objective. Even a Shakspeare represents himself in the Sonnets before no trace of himself is visible in a Falstaff or a Lear.

No news of the Englishman,--not a word. Isaura could not but feel that in his words, his looks, that day in her own garden, and those yet happier days at Enghien, there had been more than friendship; there had been love,--love enough to justify her own pride in whispering to herself, "And I love too." But then that last parting! how changed he was! how cold! She conjectured that jealousy of Rameau might, in some degree, account for the coldness when he first entered the room, but surely not when he left; surely not when she had overpassed the reserve of her sex, and implied by signs rarely misconstrued by those who love that he had no cause for jealousy of another. Yet he had gone,--parted with her pointedly as a friend, a mere friend. How foolish she had been to think this rich ambitious foreigner could ever have meant to be more! In the occupation of her work she thought to banish his image; but in that work the image was never absent; there were passages in which she pleadingly addressed it, and then would cease abruptly, stifled by passionate tears. Still she fancied that the work would reunite them; that in its pages he would hear her voice and comprehend her heart. And thus all praise of the work became very, very dear to her.

At last, after many weeks, Savarin heard from Graham. The letter was dated Aix-la-Chapelle, at which the Englishman said he might yet be some time detained. In the letter Graham spoke chiefly of the new journal: in polite compliment of Savarin's own effusions; in mixed praise and condemnation of the political and social articles signed Pierre Firmin,--praise of their intellectual power, condemnation of their moral cynicism.

"The writer," he said, "reminds me of a passage in which Montesquieu compares the heathen philosophers to those plants which the earth produces in places that have never seen the heavens. The soil of his experience does not grow a single belief; and as no community can exist without a belief of some kind, so a politician without belief can but help to destroy; he cannot reconstruct. Such writers corrupt a society; they do not reform a system."

He closed his letter with a reference to Isaura:

"Do, in your reply, my dear Savarin, tell me something about your friends Signora Venosta and the Signorina, whose work, so far as yet published, I have read with admiring astonishment at the power of a female writer so young to rival the veteran practitioners of fiction in the creation of interest in imaginary characters, and in sentiments which, if they appear somewhat over-romantic and exaggerated, still touch very fine chords in human nature not awakened in our trite every-day existence. I presume that the beauty of the *_roman_* has been duly appreciated by a public so refined as the Parisian, and that the name of the author is generally known. No doubt she is now much the rage of the literary circles, and her career as a writer may be considered fixed. Pray

present my congratulations to the Signorina when you see her."

Savarin had been in receipt of this letter some days before he called on Isaura, and carelessly showed it to her. She took it to the window to read, in order to conceal the trembling of her hands. In a few minutes she returned it silently.

"Those Englishmen," said Savarin, "have not the heart of compliment. I am by no means flattered by what he says of my trifles, and I dare say you are still less pleased with this chilly praise of your charming tale; but the man means to be civil."

"Certainly," said Isaura, smiling faintly.

"Only think of Rameau!" resumed Savarin. "On the strength of his salary in the 'Sens Commun,' and on the chateaux en Espagne which he constructs thereon, he has already furnished an apartment in the Chaussee d'Antin, and talks of setting up a coupe in order to maintain the dignity of letters when he goes to dine with the duchesses who are some day or other to invite him. Yet I admire his self-confidence, though I laugh at it. A man gets on by a spring in his own mechanism, and he should always keep it wound up. Rameau will make a figure. I used to pity him; I begin to respect. Nothing succeeds like success. But I see I am spoiling your morning. Au revoir, mon enfant."

Left alone, Isaura brooded in a sort of mournful wonderment over the words referring to herself in Graham's letter. Read though but once, she knew them by heart. What! did he consider those characters she had represented as wholly imaginary? In one--the most prominent, the most attractive--could he detect no likeness to himself? What! did he consider so "over-romantic and exaggerated" sentiments which couched appeals from her heart to his? Alas! in matters of sentiment it is the misfortune of us men that even the most refined of us often grate upon some sentiment in a woman, though she may not be romantic,--not romantic at all, as people go,--some sentiment which she thought must be so obvious if we cared a straw about her, and which, though we prize her above the Indies, is by our dim, horn-eyed, masculine vision undiscernible. It may be something in itself the airiest of trifles: the anniversary of a day in which the first kiss was interchanged, nay, of a violet gathered, a misunderstanding cleared up; and of that anniversary we remember no more than we do of our bells and coral. But she--she remembers it; it is no bells and coral to her. Of course, much is to be said in excuse of man, brute though he be. Consider the multiplicity of his occupations, the practical nature of his cares. But granting the validity of all such excuse, there is in man an original obtuseness of fibre as regards sentiment in comparison with the delicacy of woman's. It comes, perhaps, from the same hardness of constitution which forbids us the luxury of ready tears. Thus it is very difficult for the wisest man to understand thoroughly a woman. Goethe says somewhere that the highest genius in man must have much of the woman in it. If this be true, the highest genius alone in man can comprehend and explain the nature of woman, because it is not remote from him, but an integral part of his masculine self. I am not sure, however, that it necessitates the

highest genius, but rather a special idiosyncrasy in genius which the highest may or may not have. I think Sophocles a higher genius than Euripides; but Euripides has that idiosyncrasy, and Sophocles not. I doubt whether women would accept Goethe as their interpreter with the same readiness with which they would accept Schiller. Shakspeare, no doubt, excels all poets in the comprehension of women, in his sympathy with them in the woman-part of his nature which Goethe ascribes to the highest genius; but, putting aside that "monster," I do not remember any English poet whom we should consider conspicuously eminent in that lore, unless it be the prose poet, nowadays generally underrated and little read, who wrote the letters of Clarissa Harlowe. I say all this in vindication of Graham Vane, if, though a very clever man in his way, and by no means uninstructed in human nature, he had utterly failed in comprehending the mysteries which to this poor woman-child seemed to need no key for one who really loved her. But we have said somewhere before in this book that music speaks in a language which cannot explain itself except in music. So speaks, in the human heart, much which is akin to music. Fiction (that is, poetry, whether in form of rhyme or prose) speaks thus pretty often. A reader must be more commonplace than, I trust, my gentle readers are, if he suppose that when Isaura symbolized the real hero of her thoughts in the fabled hero of her romance, she depicted him as one of whom the world could say, "That is Graham Vane." I doubt if even a male poet would so vulgarize any woman whom he thoroughly revered and loved. She is too sacred to him to be thus unveiled to the public stare; as the sweetest of all ancient love-poets says well--

"Qui sapit in tacito gaudeat ille sinu."

But a girl, a girl in her first untold timid love, to let the world know, "that is the man I love and would die for!"--if such a girl be, she has no touch of the true woman-genius, and certainly she and Isaura have nothing in common. Well, then, in Isaura's invented hero, though she saw the archetypal form of Graham Vane,--saw him as in her young, vague, romantic dreams idealized, beautified, transfigured,--he would have been the vainest of men if he had seen therein the reflection of himself. On the contrary he said, in the spirit of that jealousy to which he was too prone, "Alas! this, then, is some ideal, already seen perhaps, compared to which how commonplace am I!" and thus persuading himself, no wonder that the sentiments surrounding this unrecognized archetype appeared to him over-romantic. His taste acknowledged the beauty of form which clothed them; his heart envied the ideal that inspired them. But they seemed so remote from him; they put the dreamland of the writer farther and farther from his workday real life.

In this frame of mind, then, he had written to Savarin, and the answer he received hardened it still more. Savarin had replied, as was his laudable wont in correspondence, the very day he received Graham's letter, and therefore before he had even seen Isaura. In his reply, he spoke much of the success her work had obtained; of the invitations showered upon her, and the sensation she caused in the salons; of her future career, with hope that she might even rival Madame de Grantmesnil some day, when her ideas became emboldened by maturer experience, and

a closer study of that model of eloquent style,--saying that the young editor was evidently becoming enamoured of his fair contributor; and that Madame Savarin had ventured the prediction that the Signorina's _roman_ would end in the death of the heroine, and the marriage of the writer.

CHAPTER V.

And still the weeks glided on: autumn succeeded to summer, the winter to autumn; the season of Paris was at its height. The wondrous capital seemed to repay its Imperial embellisher by the splendour and the joy of its _fetes_. But the smiles on the face of Paris were hypocritical and hollow. The Empire itself had passed out of fashion. Grave men and impartial observers felt anxious. Napoleon had renounced _les ideas Napoleoniennes_. He was passing into the category of constitutional sovereigns, and reigning, not by his old undivided prestige, but by the grace of party. The press was free to circulate complaints as to the past and demands as to the future, beneath which the present reeled, ominous of earthquake. People asked themselves if it were possible that the Empire could co-exist with forms of government not imperial, yet not genuinely constitutional, with a majority daily yielding to a minority. The basis of universal suffrage was sapped. About this time the articles in the "Sens Commun" signed Pierre Firmin were creating not only considerable sensation, but marked effect on opinion; and the sale of the journal was immense.

Necessarily the repute and the position of Gustave Rameau, as the avowed editor of this potent journal, rose with its success. Nor only his repute and position; bank-notes of considerable value were transmitted to him by the publisher, with the brief statement that they were sent by the sole proprietor of the paper as the editor's fair share of profit. The proprietor was never named, but Rameau took it for granted that it was M. Lebeau. M. Lebeau he had never seen since the day he had brought him the list of contributors, and was then referred to the publisher, whom he supposed M. Lebeau had secured, and received the first quarter of his salary in advance. The salary was a trifle compared to the extra profits thus generously volunteered. He called at Lebeau's office, and saw only the clerk, who said that his chef was abroad.

Prosperity produced a marked change for the better, if not in the substance of Rameau's character, at least in his manners and social converse. He no longer exhibited that restless envy of rivals, which is the most repulsive symptom of vanity diseased. He pardoned Isaura her success; nay, he was even pleased at it. The nature of her work did not clash with his own kind of writing. It was so thoroughly woman like that one could not compare it to a man's. Moreover, that success had contributed largely to the profits by which he had benefited, and to his renown as editor of the journal which accorded place to this new-found genius. But there was a deeper and more potent cause for sympathy with the success of his fair young contributor. He had imperceptibly glided into love with her,--a love very different from that with which poor

Julie Caumartin flattered herself she had inspired the young poet. Isaura was one of those women for whom, even in natures the least chivalric, love, however ardent, cannot fail to be accompanied with a certain reverence,--the reverence with which the ancient knighthood, in its love for women, honoured the ideal purity of womanhood itself. Till then Rameau had never revered any one.

On her side, brought so frequently into communication with the young conductor of the journal in which she wrote, Isaura entertained for him a friendly, almost sister-like affection.

I do not think that, even if she had never known the Englishman, she would have really become in love with Rameau, despite the picturesque beauty of his countenance and the congeniality of literary pursuits; but perhaps she might have fancied herself in love with him. And till one, whether man or woman, has known real love, fancy is readily mistaken for it. But little as she had seen of Graham, and that little not in itself wholly favourable to him, she knew in her heart of hearts that his image would never be replaced by one equally dear. Perhaps in those qualities that placed him in opposition to her she felt his attractions. The poetical in woman exaggerates the worth of the practical in man. Still for Rameau her exquisitely kind and sympathizing nature conceived one of those sentiments which in woman are almost angel-like. We have seen in her letters to Madame de Grantmesnil that from the first he inspired her with a compassionate interest; then the compassion was checked by her perception of his more unamiable and envious attributes. But now those attributes, if still existent, had ceased to be apparent to her, and the compassion became unalloyed. Indeed, it was thus so far increased that it was impossible for any friendly observer to look at the beautiful face of this youth, prematurely wasted and worn, without the kindness of pity. His prosperity had brightened and sweetened the expression of that face, but it had not effaced the vestiges of decay; rather perhaps deepened them, for the duties of his post necessitated a regular labour, to which he had been unaccustomed, and the regular labour necessitated, or seemed to him to necessitate, an increase of fatal stimulants. He imbibed absinthe with everything he drank, and to absinthe he united opium. This, of course, Isaura knew not, any more than she knew of his liaison with the "Ondine" of his muse; she saw only the increasing delicacy of his face and form, contrasted by his increased geniality and liveliness of spirits, and the contrast saddened her. Intellectually, too, she felt for him compassion. She recognized and respected in him the yearnings of a genius too weak to perform a tithe of what, in the arrogance of youth, it promised to its ambition. She saw, too, those struggles between a higher and a lower self, to which a weak degree of genius united with a strong degree of arrogance is so often subjected. Perhaps she overestimated the degree of genius, and what, if rightly guided, it could do; but she did, in the desire of her own heavenlier instinct, aspire to guide it heavenward. And as if she were twenty years older than himself, she obeyed that desire in remonstrating and warning and urging, and the young man took all these "preachments" with a pleased submissive patience. Such, as the new year dawned upon the grave of the, old one, was the position between these two. And nothing more was heard from Graham Vane.

CHAPTER VI.

It has now become due to Graham Vane, and to his place in the estimation of my readers, to explain somewhat more distinctly the nature of the quest in prosecution of which he had sought the aid of the Parisian police, and under an assumed name made the acquaintance of M. Lebeau.

The best way of discharging this duty will perhaps be to place before the reader the contents of the letter which passed under Graham's eyes on the day in which the heart of the writer ceased to beat.

(Confidential. To be opened immediately after my death, and before the perusal of my will.--Richard King.)

TO GRAHAM VANE, Esq.

My DEAR GRAHAM,--By the direction on the envelope of this letter, "Before the perusal of my will," I have wished to save you from the disappointment you would naturally experience if you learned my bequest without being prevised of the conditions which I am about to impose upon your honour. You will see ere you conclude this letter that you are the only man living to whom I could intrust the secret it contains and the task it enjoins.

You are aware that I was not born to the fortune that passed to me by the death of a distant relation, who had, in my earlier youth, children of his own. I was an only son, left an orphan at the age of sixteen with a very slender pittance. My guardians designed me for the medical profession. I began my studies at Edinburgh, and was sent to Paris to complete them, It so chanced that there I lodged in the same house with an artist named Auguste Duval, who, failing to gain his livelihood as a painter, in what--for his style was ambitious--is termed the Historical School, had accepted the humbler calling of a drawing-master. He had practised in that branch of the profession for several years at Tours, having a good clientele among English families settled there. This clientele, as he frankly confessed, he had lost from some irregularities of conduct. He was not a bad man, but of convivial temper, and easily led into temptation. He had removed to Paris a few months before I made his acquaintance. He obtained a few pupils, and often lost them as soon as gained. He was unpunctual and addicted to drink. But he had a small pension, accorded to him, he was wont to say mysteriously, by some high-born kinsfolk, too proud to own connection with a drawing-master, and on the condition that he should never name them. He never did name them to me, and I do not know to this day whether the story of this noble relationship was true or false. A pension, however, he did receive quarterly from some person or other, and it was an unhappy provision for him. It tended to make him an idler in his proper calling; and whenever he received the payment he spent it in debauch, to the neglect, while it

lasted, of his pupils. This man had residing with him a young daughter, singularly beautiful. You may divine the rest. I fell in love with her,--a love deepened by the compassion with which she inspired me. Her father left her so frequently that, living on the same floor, we saw much of each other. Parent and child were often in great need,--lacking even fuel or food. Of course I assisted them to the utmost of my scanty means. Much as I was fascinated by Louise Duval, I was not blind to great defects in her character. She was capricious, vain, aware of her beauty, and sighing for the pleasures or the gauds beyond her reach. I knew that she did not love me,--there was little, indeed, to captivate her fancy in a poor, thread-bare medical student,--and yet I fondly imagined that my own persevering devotion would at length win her affections, I spoke to her father more than once of my hope some day to make Louise my wife. This hope, I must frankly acknowledge, he never encouraged. On the contrary, he treated it with scorn,--"His child with her beauty would look much higher;" but he continued all the same to accept my assistance, and to sanction my visits. At length my slender purse was pretty well exhausted, and the luckless drawing-master was so harassed with petty debts that further credit became impossible. At this time I happened to hear from a fellow-student that his sister, who was the principal of a lady's school in Cheltenham, had commissioned him to look out for a first-rate teacher of drawing with whom her elder pupils could converse in French, but who should be sufficiently acquainted with English to make his instructions intelligible to the young. The salary was liberal, the school large and of high repute, and his appointment to it would open to an able teacher no inconsiderable connection among private families. I communicated this intelligence to Duval. He caught at it eagerly. He had learned at Tours to speak English fluently; and as his professional skill was of high order, and he was popular with several eminent artists, he obtained certificates as to his talents, which my fellow-student forwarded to England with specimens of Duval's drawings. In a few days the offer of an engagement arrived, was accepted, and Duval and his daughter set out for Cheltenham. At the eve of their departure, Louise, profoundly dejected at the prospect of banishment to a foreign country, and placing no trust in her father's reform to steady habits, evinced a tenderness for me hitherto new; she wept bitterly; she allowed me to believe that her tears flowed at the thought of parting with me, and even besought me to accompany them to Cheltenham, if only for a few days. You may suppose how delightedly I complied with the request. Duval had been about a week at the watering place, and was discharging the duties he had undertaken with such unwonted steadiness and regularity that I began sorrowfully to feel I had no longer an excuse for not returning to my studies at Paris, when the poor teacher was seized with a fit of paralysis. He lost the power of movement, and his mind was affected. The medical attendant called in said that he might linger thus for some time, but that, even if he recovered his intellect, which was more than doubtful, he would never be able to resume his profession. I could not leave Louise in circumstances so distressing,--I remained. The little money Duval had brought from Paris was now exhausted; and when the day on which he had been in the habit of receiving his quarter's pension came round, Louise was unable even to conjecture how it was to be applied for. It seems he had always gone for it in person; but to whom he went was a secret which he had never divulged, and at this critical juncture his

mind was too enfeebled even to comprehend us when we inquired. I had already drawn from the small capital on the interest of which I had maintained myself; I now drew out most of the remainder. But this was a resource that could not last long. Nor could I, without seriously compromising Louise's character, be constantly in the house with a girl so young, and whose sole legitimate protector was thus afflicted. There seemed but one alternative to that of abandoning her altogether,--namely, to make her my wife, to conclude the studies necessary to obtain my diploma, and purchase some partnership in a small country practice with the scanty surplus that might be left of my capital. I placed this option before Louise timidly, for I could not bear the thought of forcing her inclinations. She seemed much moved by what she called my generosity: she consented; we were married. I was, as you may conceive, wholly ignorant of French law. We were married according to the English ceremony and the Protestant ritual. Shortly after our marriage we all three returned to Paris, taking an apartment in a quarter remote from that in which we had before lodged, in order to avoid any, harassment to which such small creditors as Duval had left behind him might subject us. I resumed my studies with redoubled energy, and Louise was necessarily left much alone with her poor father in the daytime. The defects in her character became more and more visible. She reproached me for the solitude to which I condemned her; our poverty galled her; she had no kind greeting for me when I returned at evening, wearied out. Before marriage she had not loved me; after marriage, alas! I fear she hated. We had been returned to Paris some months when poor Duval died; he had never recovered his faculties, nor had we ever learned from whom his pension had been received. Very soon after her father's death I observed a singular change in the humour and manner of Louise. She was no longer peevish, irascible, reproachful; but taciturn and thoughtful. She seemed to me under the influence of some suppressed excitement, her cheeks flushed and her eye abstracted. At length, one evening when I returned I found her gone. She did not come back that night nor the next day. It was impossible for me to conjecture what had become of her. She had no friends, so far as I knew; no one had visited at our squalid apartment. The poor house in which we lodged had no concierge whom I could question; but the ground-floor was occupied by a small tobacconist's shop, and the woman at the counter told me that for some days before my wife's disappearance, she had observed her pass the shop-window in going out in the afternoon and returning towards the evening. Two terrible conjectures beset me either in her walk she had met some admirer, with whom she had fled; or, unable to bear the companionship and poverty of a union which she had begun to loathe, she had gone forth to drown herself in the Seine. On the third day from her flight I received the letter I enclose. Possibly the handwriting may serve you as a guide in the mission I intrust to you.

MONSIEUR,--You have deceived me vilely,--taken advantage of my inexperienced youth and friendless position to decoy me into an illegal marriage. My only consolation under my calamity and disgrace is, that I am at least free from a detested bond. You will not see me again,--it is idle to attempt to do so. I have obtained refuge with relations whom I have been fortunate enough to discover, and to whom I intrust my fate; and even if you could learn the

shelter I have sought, and have the audacity to molest me, you would but subject yourself to the chastisement you so richly deserve.

Louise DUVAL.

At the perusal of this cold-hearted, ungrateful letter, the love I had felt for this woman--already much shaken by her wayward and perverse temper--vanished from my heart, never to return. But as an honest man, my conscience was terribly stung. Could it be possible that I had unknowingly deceived her,--that our marriage was not legal? When I recovered from the stun which was the first effect of her letter, I sought the opinion of an avoue in the neighbourhood, named Sartiges, and to my dismay, I learned that while I, marrying according to the customs of my own country, was legally bound to Louise in England, and could not marry another, the marriage was in all ways illegal for her,--being without the consent of her relations while she was under age; without the ceremonials of the Roman Catholic Church,--to which, though I never heard any profession of religious belief from her or her father, it might fairly be presumed that she belonged; and, above all, without the form of civil contract which is indispensable to the legal marriage of a French subject.

The avoue said that the marriage, therefore, in itself was null, and that Louise could, without incurring legal penalties for bigamy, marry again in France according to the French laws; but that under the circumstances it was probable that her next of kin would apply on her behalf to the proper court for the formal annulment of the marriage, which would be the most effectual mode of saving her from any molestation on my part, and remove all possible questions hereafter as to her single state and absolute right to remarry. I had better remain quiet, and wait for intimation of further proceedings. I knew not what else to do, and necessarily submitted.

From this wretched listlessness of mind, alternated now by vehement resentment against Louise, now by the reproach of my own sense of honour in leaving that honour in so questionable a point of view, I was aroused by a letter from the distant kinsman by whom hitherto I had been so neglected. In the previous year he had lost one of his two children; the other was just dead. No nearer relation now surviving stood between me and my chance of inheritance from him. He wrote word of his domestic affliction with a manly sorrow which touched me, said that his health was failing, and begged me, as soon as possible, to come and visit him in Scotland. I went, and continued to reside with him till his death, some months afterwards. By his will I succeeded to his ample fortune on condition of taking his name.

As soon as the affairs connected with this inheritance permitted, I returned to Paris, and again saw M. Sartiges. I had never heard from Louise, nor from any one connected with her since the letter you have read. No steps had been taken to annul the marriage, and sufficient time had elapsed to render it improbable that such steps would be taken now; but if no such steps were taken, however free from the marriage-bond Louise might be, it clearly remained binding on myself.

At my request, M. Sartiges took the most vigorous measures that occurred to him to ascertain where Louise was, and what and who was the relation with whom she asserted she had found refuge. The police were employed; advertisements were issued, concealing names, but sufficiently clear to be intelligible to Louise if they came under her eye, and to the effect that if any informality in our marriage existed, she was implored for her own sake to remove it by a second ceremonial--answer to be addressed to the *_avoue_*. No answer came; the police had hitherto failed of discovering her, but were sanguine of success, when a few weeks after these advertisements a packet reached M. Sartiges, enclosing the certificates annexed to this letter, of the death of Louise Duval at Munich. The certificates, as you will see, are to appearance officially attested and unquestionably genuine. So they were considered by M. Sartiges as well as by myself. Here, then, all inquiry ceased; the police were dismissed. I was free. By little and little I overcame the painful impressions which my ill-starred union and the announcement of Louise's early death bequeathed. Rich, and of active mind, I learned to dismiss the trials of my youth as a gloomy dream. I entered into public life; I made myself a creditable position; became acquainted with your aunt; we were wedded, and the beauty of her nature embellished mine. Alas, alas! two years after our marriage--nearly five years after I had received the certificates of Louise's death--I and your aunt made a summer excursion into the country of the Rhine; on our return we rested at Aix-la-Chapelle. One day while there I was walking alone in the environs of the town, when, on the road, a little girl, seemingly about five years old, in chase of a butterfly, stumbled and fell just before my feet; I took her up, and as she was crying more from the shock of the fall than any actual hurt, I was still trying my best to comfort her, when a lady some paces behind her came up, and in taking the child from my arms as I was bending over her, thanked me in a voice that made my heart stand still. I looked up, and beheld Louise.

It was not till I had convulsively clasped her hand and uttered her name that she recognized me. I was, no doubt, the more altered of the two,--prosperity and happiness had left little trace of the needy, care worn, threadbare student. But if she were the last to recognize, she was the first to recover self-possession. The expression of her face became hard and set. I cannot pretend to repeat with any verbal accuracy the brief converse that took place between us, as she placed the child on the grass bank beside the path, bade her stay there quietly, and walked on with me some paces as if she did not wish the child to hear what was said.

The purport of what passed was to this effect: She refused to explain the certificates of her death further than that, becoming aware of what she called the "persecution" of the advertisements issued and inquiries instituted, she had caused those documents to be sent to the address given in the advertisement, in order to terminate all further molestation. But how they could have been obtained, or by what art so ingeniously forged as to deceive the acuteness of a practised lawyer, I know not to this day. She declared, indeed, that she was now happy, in easy circumstances, and that if I wished to make some reparation for the wrong I had done her, it would be to leave her in peace; and in case--

which was not likely--we ever met again, to regard and treat her as a stranger; that she, on her part, never would molest me, and that the certified death of Louise Duval left me as free to marry again as she considered herself to be.

My mind was so confused, so bewildered, while she thus talked, that I did not attempt to interrupt her. The blow had so crushed me that I scarcely struggled under it; only, as she turned to leave me, I suddenly recollected that the child, when taken from my arms, had called her "Maman," and, judging by the apparent age of the child, it must have been born but a few months after Louise had left me,--that it must be mine. And so, in my dreary woe, I faltered out, "But what of your infant? Surely that has on me a claim that you relinquish for yourself. You were not unfaithful to me while you deemed you were my wife?"

"Heavens! can you insult me by such a doubt? No!" she cried out, impulsively and haughtily. "But as I was not legally your wife, the child is not legally yours; it is mine, and only mine. Nevertheless, if you wish to claim it"--here she paused as in doubt. I saw at once that she was prepared to resign to me the child if I had urged her to do so. I must own, with a pang of remorse, that I recoiled from such a proposal. What could I do with the child? How explain to my wife the cause of my interest in it? If only a natural child of mine, I should have shrunk from owning to Janet a youthful error. But as it was,--the child by a former marriage, the former wife still living!--my blood ran cold with dread. And if I did take the child, invent what story I might as to its parentage, should I not expose myself, expose Janet, to terrible constant danger? The mother's natural affection might urge her at any time to seek tidings of the child, and in so doing she might easily discover my new name, and, perhaps years hence, establish on me her own claim.

No, I could not risk such perils. I replied sullenly, "You say rightly; the child is yours,--only yours." I was about to add an offer of pecuniary provision for it, but Louise had already turned scornfully towards the bank on which she had left the infant. I saw her snatch from the child's hand some wild flowers the poor thing had been gathering; and how often have I thought of the rude way in which she did it,--not as a mother who loves her child. Just then other passengers appeared on the road; two of them I knew,--an English couple very intimate with Lady Janet and myself. They stopped to accost me, while Louise passed by with the infant towards the town. I turned in the opposite direction, and strove to collect my thoughts. Terrible as was the discovery thus suddenly made, it was evident that Louise had as strong an interest as myself to conceal it. There was little chance that it would ever be divulged. Her dress and that of the child were those of persons in the richer classes of life. After all, doubtless, the child needed not pecuniary assistance from me, and was surely best off under the mother's care. Thus I sought to comfort and to delude myself.

The next day Janet and I left Aix-la-Chapelle and returned to England. But it was impossible for me to banish the dreadful thought that Janet was not legally my wife; that could she even guess the secret lodged in

my breast she would be lost to me forever, even though she died of the separation (you know well how tenderly she loved me). My nature underwent a silent revolution. I had previously cherished the ambition common to most men in public life,--the ambition for fame, for place, for power. That ambition left me; I shrank from the thought of becoming too well known, lest Louise or her connections, as yet ignorant of my new name, might more easily learn what the world knew; namely that I had previously borne another name,--the name of her husband,--and finding me wealthy and honoured, might hereafter be tempted to claim for herself or her daughter the ties she adjured for both while she deemed me poor and despised. But partly my conscience, partly the influence of the angel by my side, compelled me to seek whatever means of doing good to others position and circumstances placed at my disposal. I was alarmed when even such quiet exercise of mind and fortune acquired a sort of celebrity. How pain fully I shrank from it! The world attributed my dread of publicity to unaffected modesty. The world praised me, and I knew myself an impostor. But the years stole on. I heard no more of Louise or her child, and my fears gradually subsided. Yet I was consoled when the two children born to me by Janet died in their infancy. Had they lived, who can tell whether something might not have transpired to prove them illegitimate.

I must hasten on. At last came the great and crushing calamity of my life,--I lost the woman who was my all in all. At least she was spared the discovery that would have deprived me of the right of tending her deathbed, and leaving within her tomb a place vacant for myself.

But after the first agonies that followed her loss, the conscience I had so long sought to tranquillize became terribly reproachful. Louise had forfeited all right to my consideration, but my guiltless child had not done so. Did it live still? If so, was it not the heir to my fortunes,--the only child left to me? True, I have the absolute right to dispose of my wealth: it is not in land; it is not entailed: but was not the daughter I had forsaken morally the first claimant; was no reparation due to her? You remember that my physician ordered me, some little time after your aunt's death, to seek a temporary change of scene. I obeyed, and went away no one knew whither. Well, I repaired to Paris; there I sought M. Sartiges, the avoué. I found he had been long dead. I discovered his executors, and inquired if any papers or correspondence between Richard Macdonald and himself many years ago were in existence. All such documents, with others not returned to correspondents at his decease, had been burned by his desire. No possible clew to the whereabouts of Louise, should any have been gained since I last saw her, was left. What then to do I knew not. I did not dare to make inquiries through strangers, which, if discovering my child, might also bring to light a marriage that would have dishonoured the memory of my lost saint. I returned to England, feeling that my days were numbered. It is to you that I transmit the task of those researches which I could not institute. I bequeath to you, with the exception of trifling legacies and donations to public charities, the whole of my fortune; but you will understand by this letter that it is to be held on a trust which I cannot specify in my will. I could not, without dishonouring the venerated name of your aunt, indicate as the heiress of my wealth a child by a wife living at the time

I married Janet. I cannot form any words for such a devise which would not arouse gossip and suspicion, and furnish ultimately a clew to the discovery I would shun. I calculate that, after all deductions, the sum that will devolve to you will be about L220,000. That which I mean to be absolutely and at once yours is the comparatively trifling legacy of L20,000. If Louise's child be not living, or if you find full reason to suppose that despite appearances the child is not mine, the whole of my fortune lapses to you; but should Louise be surviving and need pecuniary aid, you will contrive that she may have such an annuity as you may deem fitting, without learning whence it come. You perceive that it is your object, if possible, even more than mine, to preserve free from slur the name and memory of her who was to you a second mother. All ends we desire would be accomplished could you, on discovering my lost child, feel that, without constraining your inclinations, you could make her your wife. She would then naturally share with you my fortune, and all claims of justice and duty would be quietly appeased. She would now be of age suitable to yours. When I saw her at Aix she gave promise of inheriting no small share of her mother's beauty. If Louise's assurance of her easy circumstances were true, her daughter has possibly been educated and reared with tenderness and care. You have already assured me that you have no prior attachment. But if, on discovering this child, you find her already married, or one whom you could not love nor esteem, I leave it implicitly to your honour and judgment to determine what share of the L200,000 left in your hands should be consigned to her. She may have been corrupted by her mother's principles. She may--Heaven forbid!--have fallen into evil courses, and wealth would be misspent in her hands. In that case a competence sufficing to save her from further degradation, from the temptations of poverty, would be all that I desire you to devote from my wealth. On the contrary, you may find in her one who, in all respects, ought to be my chief inheritor. All this I leave in full confidence to you, as being, of all the men I know, the one who unites the highest sense of honour with the largest share of practical sense and knowledge of life. The main difficulty, whatever this lost girl may derive from my substance, will be in devising some means to convey it to her so that neither she nor those around her may trace the bequest to me. She can never be acknowledged as my child,--never! Your reverence for the beloved dead forbids that. This difficulty your clear strong sense must overcome; mine is blinded by the shades of death. You too will deliberately consider how to institute the inquiries after mother and child so as not to betray our secret. This will require great caution. You will probably commence at Paris, through the agency of the police, to whom you will be very guarded in your communications. It is most unfortunate that I have no miniature of Louise, and that any description of her must be so vague that it may not serve to discover her; but such as it is, it may prevent your mistaking for her some other of her name. Louise was above the common height, and looked taller than she was, with the peculiar combination of very dark hair, very fair complexion, and light-gray eyes. She would now be somewhat under the age of forty. She was not without accomplishments, derived from the companionship with her father. She spoke English fluently; she drew with taste, and even with talent. You will see the prudence of confining research at first to Louise, rather than to the child who is the principal object of it; for it is not till you can ascertain what has

become of her that you can trust the accuracy of any information respecting the daughter, whom I assume, perhaps after all erroneously, to be mine. Though Louise talked with such levity of holding herself free to marry, the birth of her child might be sufficient injury to her reputation to become a serious obstacle to such second nuptials, not having taken formal steps to annul her marriage with myself. If not thus remarried, there would be no reason why she should not resume her maiden name of Duval, as she did in the signature of her letter to me: finding that I had ceased to molest her by the inquiries, to elude which she had invented the false statement of her death. It seems probable, therefore, that she is residing somewhere in Paris, and in the name of Duval. Of course the burden of uncertainty as to your future cannot be left to oppress you for an indefinite length of time. If at the end, say, of two years, your researches have wholly failed, consider three-fourths of my whole fortune to have passed to you, and put by the fourth to accumulate, should the child afterwards be discovered, and satisfy your judgment as to her claims on me as her father. Should she not, it will be a reserve fund for your own children. But oh, if my child could be found in time! and oh, if she be all that could win your heart, and be the wife you would select from free choice! I can say no more. Pity me, and judge leniently of Janet's husband.

R. K.

The key to Graham's conduct is now given,--the deep sorrow that took him to the tomb of the aunt he so revered, and whose honoured memory was subjected to so great a risk; the slightness of change in his expenditure and mode of life, after an inheritance supposed to be so ample; the abnegation of his political ambition; the subject of his inquiries, and the cautious reserve imposed upon them; above all, the position towards Isaura in which he was so cruelly placed.

Certainly, his first thought in revolving the conditions of his trust had been that of marriage with this lost child of Richard King's, should she be discovered single, disengaged, and not repulsive to his inclinations. Tacitly he subscribed to the reasons for this course alleged by the deceased. It was the simplest and readiest plan of uniting justice to the rightful inheritor with care for a secret so important to the honour of his aunt, of Richard King himself,--his benefactor,--of the illustrious house from which Lady Janet had sprung. Perhaps, too, the consideration that by this course a fortune so useful to his career was secured was not without influence on the mind of a man naturally ambitious. But on that consideration he forbade himself to dwell. He put it away from him as a sin. Yet, to marriage with any one else, until his mission was fulfilled, and the uncertainty as to the extent of his fortune was dispelled, there interposed grave practical obstacles. How could he honestly present himself to a girl and to her parents in the light of a rich man, when in reality he might be but a poor man? How could he refer to any lawyer the conditions which rendered impossible any settlement that touched a shilling of the large sum which at any day he might have to transfer to another? Still, when once fully conspicuous how deep was the love with which Isaura had inspired him, the idea of wedlock with the daughter of Richard King, if she yet lived and was

single, became inadmissible. The orphan condition of the young Italian smoothed away the obstacles to proposals of marriage which would have embarrassed his addresses to girls of his own rank, and with parents who would have demanded settlements. And if he had found Isaura alone on that day on which he had seen her last, he would doubtless have yielded to the voice of his heart, avowed his love, wooed her own, and committed both to the tie of betrothal. We have seen how rudely such yearnings of his heart were repelled on that last interview. His English prejudices were so deeply rooted, that, even if he had been wholly free from the trust bequeathed to him, he would have recoiled from marriage with a girl who, in the ardour for notoriety, could link herself with such associates as Gustave Rameau, by habits a Bohemian, and by principles a Socialist.

In flying from Paris, he embraced the resolve to banish all thought of wedding Isaura, and to devote himself sternly to the task which had so sacred a claim upon him. Not that he could endure the idea of marrying another, even if the lost heiress should be all that his heart could have worshipped, had that heart been his own to give; but he was impatient of the burden heaped on him,--of the fortune which might not be his, of the uncertainty which paralyzed all his ambitious schemes for the future.

Yet, strive as he would--and no man could strive more resolutely--he could not succeed in banishing the image of Isaura. It was with him always; and with it a sense of irreparable loss, of a terrible void, of a pining anguish.

And the success of his inquiries at Aix-la-Chapelle, while sufficient to detain him in the place, was so slight, and advanced by such slow degrees, that it furnished no continued occupation to his restless mind. M. Renard was acute and painstaking. But it was no easy matter to obtain any trace of a Parisian visitor to so popular a Spa so many years ago. The name Duval, too, was so common, that at Aix, as we have seen at Paris, time was wasted in the chase of a Duval who proved not to be the lost Louise. At last M. Renard chanced on a house in which, in the year 1849, two ladies from Paris had lodged for three weeks. One was named Madame Duval, the other Madame Marigny. They were both young, both very handsome, and much of the same height and colouring. But Madame Marigny was the handsomer of the two. Madame Duval frequented the gaming-tables and was apparently of very lively temper. Madame Marigny lived very quietly, rarely or never stirred out, and seemed in delicate health. She, however, quitted the apartment somewhat abruptly, and, to the best of the lodging-house-keeper's recollection, took rooms in the country near Aix--she could not remember where. About two months after the departure of Madame Marigny, Madame Duval also left Aix, and in company with a French gentleman who had visited her much of late,--a handsome man of striking appearance. The lodging house-keeper did not know what or who he was. She remembered that he used to be announced to Madame Duval by the name of M. Achille. Madame Duval had never been seen again by the lodging-house-keeper after she had left. But Madame Marigny she had once seen, nearly five years after she had quitted the lodgings,--seen her by chance at the railway station, recognized her at once, and accosted her, offering her the old apartment. Madame Marigny had, however, briefly replied that she was only at Aix for a few hours, and should quit it the

same day.

The inquiry now turned towards Madame Marigny. The date on which the lodging-house-keeper had last seen her coincided with the year in which Richard King had met Louise. Possibly, therefore, she might have accompanied the latter to Aix at that time, and could, if found, give information as to her subsequent history and present whereabouts.

After a tedious search throughout all the environs of Aix, Graham himself came, by the merest accident, upon the vestiges of Louise's friend. He had been wandering alone in the country round Aix, when a violent thunderstorm drove him to ask shelter in the house of a small farmer, situated in a field, a little off the byway which he had taken. While waiting for the cessation of the storm, and drying his clothes by the fire in a room that adjoined the kitchen, he entered into conversation with the farmer's wife, a pleasant, well-mannered person, and made some complimentary observation on a small sketch of the house in water-colours that hung upon the wall. "Ah," said the farmer's wife, "that was done by a French lady who lodged here many years ago. She drew very prettily, poor thing."

"A lady who lodged here many years ago,--how many?"

"Well, I guess somewhere about twenty."

"Ah, indeed! Was it a Madame Marigny?"

"Bon Dieu! That was indeed her name. Did you know her? I should be so glad to hear she is well and--I hope--happy."

"I do not know where she is now, and am making inquiries to ascertain. Pray help me. How long did Madame Marigny lodge with you?"

"I think pretty well two months; yes, two months. She left a month after her confinement."

"She was confined here?"

"Yes. When she first came, I had no idea that she was _enceinte_. She had a pretty figure, and no one would have guessed it, in the way she wore her shawl. Indeed I only began to suspect it a few days before it happened; and that was so suddenly, that all was happily over before we could send for the _accoucheur_."

"And the child lived?--a girl or a boy?"

"A girl,--the prettiest baby."

"Did she take the child with her when she went?"

"No; it was put out to nurse with a niece of my husband who was confined about the same time. Madame paid liberally in advance, and continued to send money half-yearly, till she came herself and took away the little

girl."

"When was that,--a little less than five years after she had left it?"

"Why, you know all about it, Monsieur; yes, not quite five years after. She did not come to see me, which I thought unkind, but she sent me, through my niece-in-law, a real gold watch and a shawl. Poor dear lady--for lady she was all over,--with proud ways, and would not bear to be questioned. But I am sure she was none of your French light ones, but an honest wife like myself, though she never said so."

"And have you no idea where she was all the five years she was away, or where she went after reclaiming her child?"

"No, indeed, Monsieur."

"But her remittances for the infant must have been made by letters, and the letters would have had post-marks?"

"Well, I dare say; I am no scholar myself. But suppose you see Marie Hubert, that is my niece-in-law, perhaps she has kept the envelopes."

"Where does Madame Hubert live?"

"It is just a league off by the short path; you can't miss the way. Her husband has a bit of land of his own, but he is also a carrier--'Max Hubert, carrier,'--written over the door, just opposite the first church you get to. The rain has ceased, but it may be too far for you to-day."

"Not a bit of it. Many thanks."

"But if you find out the dear lady and see her, do tell her how pleased I should be to hear good news of her and the little one."

Graham strode on under the clearing skies to the house indicated. He found Madame Hubert at home, and ready to answer all questions; but, alas! she had not the envelopes. Madame Marigny, on removing the child, had asked for all the envelopes or letters, and carried them away with her. Madame Hubert, who was as little of a scholar as her aunt-in-law was, had never paid much attention to the post-marks on the envelopes; and the only one that she did remember was the first, that contained a bank-note, and that post-mark was "Vienna."

"But did not Madame Marigny's letters ever give you an address to which to write with news of her child?"

"I don't think she cared much for her child, Monsieur. She kissed it very coldly when she came to take it away. I told the poor infant that that was her own mamma; and Madame said, 'Yes, you may call me maman,' in a tone of voice--well, not at all like that of a mother. She brought with her a little bag which contained some fine clothes for the child, and was very impatient till the child had got them on."

"Are you quite sure it was the same lady who left the child?"

"Oh, there is no doubt of that. She was certainly *_tres belle_*, but I did not fancy her as aunt did. She carried her head very high, and looked rather scornful. However, I must say she behaved very generously."

"Still you have not answered my question whether her letters contained no address."

She never wrote more than two letters. One enclosing the first remittance was but a few lines, saying that if the child was well and thriving, I need not write; but if it died or became dangerously ill, I might at any time write a line to Madame -----, Poste Restante, Vienna. She was travelling about, but the letter would be sure to reach her sooner or later. The only other letter I had was to apprise me that she was coming to remove the child, and might be expected in three days after the receipt of her letter."

"And all the other communications from her were merely remittances in blank envelopes?"

"Exactly so."

Graham, finding he could learn no more, took his departure. On his way home, meditating the new idea that his adventure that day suggested, he resolved to proceed at once, accompanied by M. Renard, to Munich, and there learn what particulars could be yet ascertained respecting those certificates of the death of Louise Duval, to which (sharing Richard King's very natural belief that they had been skilfully forged) he had hitherto attached no importance.

CHAPTER VII.

No satisfactory result attended the inquiries made at Munich save indeed this certainty,--the certificates attesting the decease of some person calling herself Louise Duval had not been forged. They were indubitably genuine. A lady bearing that name had arrived at one of the principal hotels late in the evening, and had there taken handsome rooms. She was attended by no servant, but accompanied by a gentleman, who, however, left the hotel as soon as he had seen her lodged to her satisfaction. The books of the hotel still retained the entry of her name,--Madame Duval, *_Francaise rentiere_*. On comparing the handwriting of this entry with the letter from Richard King's first wife, Graham found it to differ; but then it was not certain, though probable, that the entry had been written by the alleged Madame Duval herself. She was visited the next day by the same gentleman who had accompanied her on arriving. He dined and spent the evening with her. But no one at the hotel could remember what was the gentleman's name, nor even if he were announced by any name. He never called again. Two days afterwards, Madame Duval was

taken ill; a doctor was sent for, and attended her till her death. This doctor was easily found. He remembered the case perfectly,--congestion of the lungs, apparently caused by cold caught on her journey. Fatal symptoms rapidly manifested themselves, and she died on the third day from the seizure. She was a young and handsome woman. He had asked her during her short illness if he should not write to her friends; if there were no one she would wish to be sent for. She replied that there was only one friend, to whom she had already written, and who would arrive in a day or two; and on inquiring, it appeared that she had written such a letter, and taken it herself to the post on the morning of the day she was taken ill.

She had in her purse not a large sum, but money enough to cover all her expenses, including those of her funeral, which, according to the law in force at the place, followed very quickly on her decease. The arrival of the friend to whom she had written being expected, her effects were, in the meanwhile, sealed up. The day after her death a letter arrived for her, which was opened. It was evidently written by a man, and apparently by a lover. It expressed an impassioned regret that the writer was unavoidably prevented returning to Munich so soon as he had hoped, but trusted to see his dear *_bouton de rose_* in the course of the following week; it was only signed Achille, and gave no address. Two or three days after, a lady, also young and handsome, arrived at the hotel, and inquired for Madame Duval. She was greatly shocked at hearing of her decease. When sufficiently recovered to bear being questioned as to Madame Duval's relations and position, she appeared confused; said, after much pressing, that she was no relation to the deceased; that she believed Madame Duval had no relations with whom she was on friendly terms,--at least she had never heard her speak of any; and that her own acquaintance with the deceased, though cordial, was very recent. She could or would not give any clue to the writer of the letter signed Achille, and she herself quitted Munich that evening, leaving the impression that Madame Duval had been one of those ladies who, in adopting a course of life at variance with conventional regulations, are repudiated by their relations, and probably drop even their rightful names.

Achille never appeared; but a few days after, a lawyer at Munich received a letter from another at Vienna, requesting, in compliance with a client's instructions, the formal certificates of Louise Duval's death. These were sent as directed, and nothing more about the ill-fated woman was heard of. After the expiration of the time required by law, the seals were removed from the effects, which consisted of two *_malles_* and a dressing-case. But they only contained the articles appertaining to a lady's wardrobe or toilet,--no letters, not even another note from Achille,--no clue, in short, to the family or antecedents of the deceased. What then had become of these effects, no one at the hotel could give a clear or satisfactory account. It was said by the mistress of the hotel, rather sullenly, that they had, she supposed, been sold by her predecessor, and by order of the authorities, for the benefit of the poor.

If the lady who had represented herself as Louise Duval's acquaintance

had given her own name, which doubtless she did, no one recollected it. It was not entered in the books of the hotel, for she had not lodged there; nor did it appear that she had allowed time for formal examination by the civil authorities. In fact, it was clear that poor Louise Duval had been considered as an adventuress by the hotel-keeper and the medical attendant at Munich; and her death had excited so little interest, that it was strange that even so many particulars respecting it could be gleaned.

After a prolonged but fruitless stay at Munich, Graham and M. Renard repaired to Vienna; there, at least, Madame Marigny had given an address, and there she might be heard of.

At Vienna, however, no research availed to discover a trace of any such person; and in despair Graham returned to England in the January of 1870, and left the further prosecution of his inquiries to M. Renard, who, though obliged to transfer himself to Paris for a time, promised that he would leave no stone unturned for the discovery of Madame Marigny; and Graham trusted to that assurance when M. Renard, rejecting half of the large gratuity offered him, added, "Je suis Francais; this with me has ceased to be an affair of money; it has become an affair that involves my _amour propre_."

CHAPTER VIII.

If Graham Vane had been before caressed and courted for himself, he was more than ever appreciated by polite society, now that he added the positive repute of wealth to that of a promising intellect. Fine ladies said that Graham Vane was a match for any girl. Eminent politicians listened to him with a more attentive respect, and invited him to select dinner-parties. His cousin the Duke urged him to announce his candidature for the county, and purchase back, at least, the old Stamm-schloss. But Graham obstinately refused to entertain either proposal, continued to live as economically as before in his old apartments, and bore with an astonishing meekness of resignation the unsolicited load of fashion heaped upon his shoulders. At heart he was restless and unhappy. The mission bequeathed to him by Richard King haunted his thoughts like a spectre not to be exorcised. Was his whole life to be passed in the weary sustainment of an imposture which in itself was gall and wormwood to a nature constitutionally frank and open? Was he forever to appear a rich man and live as a poor one? Was he till his deathbed to be deemed a sordid miser whenever he refused a just claim on his supposed wealth, and to feel his ambition excluded from the objects it earnestly coveted, and which he was forced to appear too much of an Epicurean philosopher to prize?

More torturing than all else to the man's innermost heart was the consciousness that he had not conquered, could not conquer, the yearning love with which Isaura had inspired him, and yet that against such love all his reasonings, all his prejudices, more stubbornly than ever were

combined. In the French newspapers which he had glanced over while engaged in his researches in Germany--nay, in German critical journals themselves--he had seen so many notices of the young author,--highly eulogistic, it is true, but which to his peculiar notions were more offensive than if they had been sufficiently condemnatory of her work to discourage her from its repetition; notices which seemed to him the supreme impertinences which no man likes exhibited towards the woman to whom he would render the chivalrous homage of respect. Evidently this girl had become as much public property as if she had gone on the stage. Minute details of her personal appearance,--of the dimples on her cheek, of the whiteness of her arms, of her peculiar way of dressing her hair; anecdotes of her from childhood (of course invented, but how could Graham know that?); of the reasons why she had adopted the profession of author instead of that of the singer; of the sensation she had created in certain salons (to Graham, who knew Paris so well, _salons_ in which he would not have liked his wife to appear); of the compliments paid to her by _grands seigneurs_ noted for their _liaisons_ with ballet-dancers, or by authors whose genius soared far beyond the _flamantia maenia_ of a world confined by respect for one's neighbours' land-marks,--all this, which belongs to ground of personal gossip untouched by English critics of female writers, ground especially favoured by Continental, and, I am grieved to say, by American journalists,--all this was to the sensitive Englishman much what the minute inventory of Egeria's charms would have been to Numa Pompilius. The nymph, hallowed to him by secret devotion, was vulgarized by the noisy hands of the mob, and by the popular voices, which said, "We know more about Egeria than you do." And when he returned to England, and met with old friends familiar to Parisian life, who said, "of course you have read the Cicogna's _roman_. What do you think of it? Very fine writing, I dare say, but above me. I go in for 'Les Mysteres de Paris' or 'Monte Cristo;' but I even find Georges Sand a bore," then as a critic Graham Vane fired up, extolled the _roman_ he would have given his ears for Isaura never to have written; but retired from the contest muttering inly, "How can I--I, Graham Vane--how can I be such an idiot; how can I in every hour of the twenty-four sigh to myself, 'What are other women to me? Isaura, Isaura!'"

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