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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

It is the first week in the month of May, 1870. Celebrities are of rapid growth in the salons of Paris. Gustave Rameau has gained the position for which he sighed. The journal he edits has increased its hold on the public, and his share of the profits has been liberally augmented by the secret proprietor. Rameau is acknowledged as a power in literary circles. And as critics belonging to the same clique praise each other in Paris, whatever they may do in communities more rigidly virtuous, his poetry has been declared by authorities in the press to be superior to that of Alfred de Musset in vigour--to that of Victor Hugo in refinement; neither of which assertions would much, perhaps, shock a cultivated understanding.

It is true that it (Gustave's poetry) has not gained a wide audience among the public. But with regard to poetry nowadays, there are plenty of persons who say as Dr. Johnson said of the verse of Spratt, "I would rather praise it than read."

At all events, Rameau was courted in gay and brilliant circles, and, following the general example of French *_litterateurs_* in fashion, lived well up to the income he received, had a delightful bachelor's apartment, furnished with artistic effect, spent largely on the adornment of his person, kept a coupe, and entertained profusely at the cafe Anglais and the Maison Doree. A reputation that inspired a graver and more unquiet interest had been created by the Vicomte de Mauleon. Recent articles in the *Sens Commun*, written under the name of Pierre Firmin on the discussions on the vexed question of the plebiscite, had given umbrage to the Government, and Rameau had received an intimation that he, as editor, was responsible for the compositions of the contributors to the journal he edited; and that though, so long as Pierre Firmin had kept his caustic spirit within proper bounds, the Government had winked at the evasion of the law which required every political article in a journal to be signed by the real name of its author, it could do so no longer. Pierre Firmin was apparently a *_nom de plume_*; if not, his identity must be proved, or Rameau would pay the penalty which his contributor seemed bent on incurring.

Rameau, much alarmed for the journal that might be suspended, and for himself who might be imprisoned, conveyed this information through the publisher to his correspondent Pierre Firmin, and received the next day an article signed Victor de Mauleon, in which the writer proclaimed himself to be one and the same with Pierre Firmin, and, taking a yet bolder tone than he had before assumed, dared the Government to attempt legal measures against him. The Government was prudent enough to

disregard that haughty bravado, but Victor de Mauleon rose at once into political importance. He had already in his real name and his quiet way established a popular and respectable place in Parisian society. But if this revelation created him enemies whom he had not before provoked, he was now sufficiently acquitted, by tacit consent, of the sins formerly laid to his charge, to disdain the assaults of party wrath. His old reputation for personal courage and skill in sword and pistol served, indeed, to protect him from such charges as a Parisian journalist does not reply to with his pen. If he created some enemies, he created many more friends, or, at least, partisans and admirers. He only needed fine and imprisonment to become a popular hero.

A few days after he had thus proclaimed himself, Victor de Mauleon--who had before kept aloof from Rameau, and from salons at which he was likely to meet that distinguished minstrel--solicited his personal acquaintance, and asked him to breakfast.

Rameau joyfully went. He had a very natural curiosity to see the contributor whose articles had so mainly insured the sale of the *Sens Commun*.

In the dark-haired, keen-eyed, well-dressed, middle-aged man, with commanding port and courtly address, he failed to recognise any resemblance to the flaxen-wigged, long-coated, bespectacled, shambling sexagenarian whom he had known as Lebeau. Only now and then a tone of voice struck him as familiar, but he could not recollect where he had heard the voice it resembled. The thought of Lebeau did not occur to him; if it had occurred it would only have struck him as a chance coincidence. Rameau, like most egotists, was rather a dull observer of men. His genius was not objective.

"I trust, Monsieur Rameau," said the Vicomte, as he and his guest were seated at the breakfast-table, "that you are not dissatisfied with the remuneration your eminent services in the journal have received."

"The proprietor, whoever he be, has behaved most liberally," answered Rameau.

"I take that compliment to myself, *cher confrere*; for though the expenses of starting the *Sens Commun*, and the caution money lodged, were found by a friend of mine, that was as a loan, which I have long since repaid, and the property in the journal is now exclusively mine. I have to thank you not only for your own brilliant contributions, but for those of the colleagues you secured. Monsieur Savarin's piquant criticisms were most valuable to us at starting. I regret to have lost his aid. But as he has set up a new journal of his own, even he has not wit enough to spare for another. *A propos* of our contributors, I shall ask you to present me to the fair author of *The Artist's Daughter*. I am of too prosaic a nature to appreciate justly the merits of a *roman*; but I have heard warm praise of this story from the young--they are the best judges of that kind of literature; and I can at least understand the worth of a contributor who trebled the sale of our journal. It is a misfortune to us, indeed, that her work is completed, but I trust that the sum sent to

her through our publisher suffices to tempt her to favour us with another roman in series."

"Mademoiselle Cicogna," said Rameau, with a somewhat sharper intonation of his sharp voice, "has accepted for the republication of her _roman_ in a separate form terms which attest the worth of her genius, and has had offers from other journals for a serial tale of even higher amount than the sum so generously sent to her through your publisher."

"Has she accepted them, Monsieur Rameau? If so, _tant pis pour vous_. Pardon me, I mean that your salary suffers in proportion as the Sens Commun declines in sale."

"She has not accepted them. I advised her not to do so until she could compare them with those offered by the proprietor of the Sens Commun."

"And your advice guides her? Ah, _cher confrere_, you are a happy man!-- you have influence over this young aspirant to the fame of a De Stael or a Georges Sand."

"I flatter myself that I have some," answered Rameau, smiling loftily as he helped himself to another tumbler of Volnay wine--excellent, but rather heady.

"So much the better. I leave you free to arrange terms with Mademoiselle Cicogna, higher than she can obtain elsewhere, and kindly contrive my own personal introduction to her--you have breakfasted already?--permit me to offer you a cigar--excuse me if I do not bear you company; I seldom smoke--never of a morning. Now to business, and the state of France. Take that easy-chair, seat yourself comfortably. So! Listen! If ever Mephistopheles revisit the earth, how he will laugh at Universal Suffrage and Vote by Ballot in an old country like France, as things to be admired by educated men, and adopted by friends of genuine freedom!"

"I don't understand you," said Rameau.

"In this respect at least, let me hope that I can furnish you with understanding.

"The Emperor has resorted to a plebiscite--viz., a vote by ballot and universal suffrage--as to certain popular changes which circumstances compel him to substitute for his former personal rule. Is there a single intelligent Liberal who is not against that plebiscite?--is there any such who does not know that the appeal of the Emperor to universal suffrage and vote by ballot must result in a triumph over all the variations of free thought, by the unity which belongs to Order, represented through an able man at the head of the State? The multitude never comprehend principles; principles are complex ideas; they comprehend a single idea, and the simplest idea is, a Name that rids their action of all responsibility to thought.

"Well, in France there are principles superabundant which you can pit against the principle of Imperial rule. But there is not one name you

can pit against Napoleon the Third; therefore, I steer our little bark in the teeth of the popular gale when I denounce the plebiscite, and *Le Sens Commun* will necessarily fall in sale--it is beginning to fall already. We shall have the educated men with us, the rest against. In every country--even in China, where all are highly educated--a few must be yet more highly educated than the many. Monsieur Rameau, I desire to overthrow the Empire: in order to do that, it is not enough to have on my side the educated men, I must have the *_canaille_*--the *_canaille_* of Paris and of the manufacturing towns. But I use the *canaille* for my purpose--I don't mean to enthrone it. You comprehend?--the *_canaille_* quiescent is simply mud at the bottom of a stream; the *_canaille_* agitated is mud at the surface. But no man capable of three ideas builds the palaces and senates of civilised society out of mud, be it at the top or the bottom of an ocean. Can either you or I desire that the destinies of France shall be swayed by coxcombical artisans who think themselves superior to every man who writes grammar, and whose idea of a commonwealth is the confiscation of private property?" Rameau, thoroughly puzzled by this discourse, bowed his head, and replied whisperingly, "Proceed. You are against the Empire, yet against the populace!--What are you for? not, surely, the Legitimists?--are you Republican? Orleanist? or what?"

"Your questions are very pertinent," answered the Vicomte, courteously, "and my answer shall be very frank. I am against absolute rule, whether under a Buonaparte or a Bourbon. I am for a free State, whether under a constitutional hereditary sovereign like the English or Belgian, or whether, republican in name, it be less democratic than constitutional monarchy in practice, like the American. But as a man interested in the fate of *_le Sens Commun_*, I hold in profound disdain all crotchets for revolutionising the elements of Human Nature. Enough of this abstract talk. To the point. You are of course aware of the violent meetings held by the Socialists, nominally against the plebiscite, really against the Emperor himself?"

"Yes, I know at least that the working class are extremely discontented; the numerous strikes last month were not on a mere question of wages--they were against the existing forms of society. And the articles by Pierre Firmin which brought me into collision with the Government, seemed to differ from what you now say. They approve those strikes; they appeared to sympathise with the revolutionary meetings at Belleville and Montmartre."

"Of course--we use coarse tools for destroying; we cast them aside for finer ones when we want to reconstruct."

"I attended one of those meetings last night. See, I have a pass for all such assemblies, signed by some dolt who cannot even spell the name he assumes--'Pom-de-Tair.' A commissary of police sat yawning at the end of the orchestra, his secretary by his side, while the orators stammer out fragments of would-be thunderbolts. Commissary of police yawns more wearily than before, secretary disdains to use his pen, seizes his penknife and pares his nails. Up rises a wild-haired, weak-limbed silhouette of a man, and affecting a solemnity of mien which might have

become the virtuous Guizot, moves this resolution: 'The French people condemns Charles Louis Napoleon the Third to the penalty of perpetual hard labour.' Then up rises the commissary of police and says quietly, 'I declare this meeting at an end.'

"Sensation among the audience--they gesticulate--they screech--they bellow--the commissary puts on his greatcoat--the secretary gives a last touch to his nails and pockets his penknife--the audience disperses--the silhouette of a man effaces itself--all is over."

"You describe the scene most wittily," said Rameau, laughing, but the laugh was constrained. A would-be cynic himself, there was a something grave and earnest in the real cynic that awed him.

"What conclusion do you draw from such a scene, _cher poete_" asked De Mauleon, fixing his keen quiet eyes on Rameau.

"What conclusion? Well, that--that--"

"Yes, continue."

"That the audience were sadly degenerated from the time when Mirabeau said to a Master of the Ceremonies, 'We are here by the power of the French people, and nothing but the point of the bayonet shall expel us.'"

"Spoken like a poet, a French poet. I suppose you admire M. Victor Hugo. Conceding that he would have employed a more sounding phraseology, comprising more absolute ignorance of men, times, and manners in unintelligible metaphor and melodramatic braggadocio, your answer might have been his; but pardon me if I add, it would not be that of Common Sense."

"Monsieur le Vicomte might rebuke me more politely," said Rameau, colouring high.

"Accept my apologies; I did not mean to rebuke, but to instruct. The times are not those of 1789. And Nature, ever repeating herself in the production of coxcombs and blockheads, never repeats herself in the production of Mirabeaus. The Empire is doomed--doomed, because it is hostile to the free play of intellect. Any Government that gives absolute preponderance to the many is hostile to intellect, for intellect is necessarily confined to the few.

"Intellect is the most revengeful of all the elements of society. It cares not what the materials through which it insinuates or forces its way to its seat.

"I accept the aid of Pom-de-Tair. I do not demean myself to the extent of writing articles that may favor the principles of Pom-de-Tair, signed in the name of Victor de Mauleon or of Pierre Firinin.

"I will beg you, my dear editor, to obtain clever, smart writers, who know nothing about Socialists and Internationalists, who therefore will

not commit *Le Sens Commun* by advocating the doctrines of those idiots, but who will flatter the vanity of the *canaille*--vaguely; write any stuff they please about the renown of Paris, 'the eye of the world,' 'the sun of the European system,' &c., of the artisans of Paris as supplying soul to that eye and fuel to that sun--any *blague* of that sort--*genre Victor Hugo*; but nothing definite against life and property, nothing that may not be considered hereafter as the harmless extravagance of a poetic enthusiasm. You might write such articles yourself. In fine, I want to excite the multitude, and yet not to commit our journal to the contempt of the few. Nothing is to be admitted that may bring the law upon us except it be signed by my name. There may be a moment in which it would be desirable for somebody to be sent to prison: in that case, I allow no substitute--I go myself.

"Now you have my most secret thoughts. I intrust them to your judgment with entire confidence. Monsieur Lebeau gave you a high character, which you have hitherto deserved. By the way, have you seen anything lately of that bourgeois conspirator?"

"No, his professed business of letter-writer or agent is transferred to a clerk, who says M. Lebeau is abroad."

"Ah! I don't think that is true. I fancy I saw him the other evening gilding along the lanes of Belleville. He is too confirmed a conspirator to be long out of Paris; no place like Paris for seething brains."

"Have you known M. Lebeau long?" asked Rameau. "Ay, many years. We are both Norman by birth, as you may perceive by something broad in our accent."

"Ha! I knew your voice was familiar to me; certainly it does remind me of Lebeau's."

"Normans are like each other in many things besides voice and accent--obstinacy, for instance, in clinging to ideas once formed; this makes them good friends and steadfast enemies. I would advise no man to make an enemy of Lebeau.

"*Au revoir, cher confrere*. Do not forget to present me to Mademoiselle Cicogna."

CHAPTER II.

On leaving De Mauleon and regaining his coupe, Rameau felt at once bewildered and humbled, for he was not prepared for the tone of careless superiority which the Vicomte assumed over him. He had expected to be much complimented, and he comprehended vaguely that he had been somewhat snubbed. He was not only irritated--he was bewildered; for De Mauleon's political disquisitions did not leave any clear or definite idea on his mind as to the principles which as editor of the *Sens Commun* he was to

see adequately represented and carried out. In truth, Rameau was one of those numerous Parisian politicians who have read little and reflected less on the government of men and States. Envy is said by a great French writer to be the vice of Democracies. Envy certainly had made Rameau a democrat. He could talk and write glibly enough upon the themes of equality and fraternity, and was so far an ultra-democrat that he thought moderation the sign of a mediocre understanding.

De Mauleon's talk, therefore, terribly perplexed him. It was unlike anything he had heard before. Its revolutionary professions, accompanied with so much scorn for the multitude, and the things the multitude desired, were Greek to him. He was not shocked by the cynicism which placed wisdom in using the passions of mankind as tools for the interests of an individual; but he did not understand the frankness of its avowal.

Nevertheless the man had dominated over and subdued him. He recognized the power of his contributor without clearly analysing its nature-- a power made up of large experience of life, of cold examination of doctrines that heated others--of patrician calm--of intellectual sneer--of collected confidence in self.

Besides, Rameau felt, with a nervous misgiving, that in this man, who so boldly proclaimed his contempt for the instruments he used, he had found a master. De Mauleon, then, was sole proprietor of the journal from which Rameau drew his resources; might at any time dismiss him; might at any time involve the journal in penalties which, even if Rameau could escape in his official capacity as editor, still might stop the *Sens Commun*, and with it Rameau's luxurious subsistence.

Altogether the visit to De Mauleon had been anything but a pleasant one. He sought, as the carriage rolled on, to turn his thoughts to more agreeable subjects, and the image of Isaura rose before him. To do him justice he had learned to love this girl as well as his nature would permit: he loved her with the whole strength of his imagination, and though his heart was somewhat cold, his imagination was very ardent. He loved her also with the whole strength of his vanity, and vanity was even a more preponderant organ of his system than imagination. To carry off as his prize one who had already achieved celebrity, whose beauty and fascination of manner were yet more acknowledged than her genius, would certainly be a glorious triumph.

Every Parisian of Rameau's stamp looks forward in marriage to a brilliant salon. What salon more brilliant than that which he and Isaura united could command? He had long conquered his early impulse of envy at Isaura's success,--in fact that success had become associated with his own, and had contributed greatly to his enrichment. So that to other motives of love he might add the prudential one of interest. Rameau well knew that his own vein of composition, however lauded by the cliques, and however unrivalled in his own eyes, was not one that brings much profit in the market. He compared himself to those poets who are too far in advance of their time to be quite as sure of bread and cheese as they are of immortal fame.

But he regarded Isaura's genius as of a lower order, and a thing in itself very marketable. Marry her, and the bread and cheese were so certain that he might elaborate as slowly as he pleased the verses destined to immortal fame. Then he should be independent of inferior creatures like Victor de Mauleon. But while Rameau convinced himself that he was passionately in love with Isaura, he could not satisfy himself that she was in love with him.

Though during the past year they had seen each other constantly, and their literary occupations had produced many sympathies between them--though he had intimated that many of his most eloquent love-poems were inspired by her--though he had asserted in prose, very pretty prose too, that she was all that youthful poets dream of,--yet she had hitherto treated such declarations with a playful laugh, accepting them as elegant compliments inspired by Parisian gallantry; and he felt an angry and sore foreboding that if he were to insist too seriously on the earnestness of their import and ask her plainly to be his wife, her refusal would be certain, and his visits to her house might be interdicted.

Still Isaura was unmarried, still she had refused offers of marriage from men higher placed than himself,--still he divined no one whom she could prefer. And as he now leaned back in his coupe he muttered to himself, "Oh, if I could but get rid of that little demon Julie, I would devote myself so completely to winning Isaura's heart that I must succeed!--but how to get rid of Julie? She so adores me, and is so headstrong! She is capable of going to Isaura--showing my letters--making such a scene!"

Here he checked the carriage at a cafe on the Boulevard--descended, imbibed two glasses of absinthe,--and then feeling much emboldened, remounted his coupe and directed the driver to Isaura's apartment.

CHAPTER III.

Yes, celebrities are of rapid growth in the salons of Paris. Far more solid than that of Rameau, far more brilliant than that of De Mauleon, was the celebrity which Isaura had now acquired. She had been unable to retain the pretty suburban villa at A-----. The owner wanted to alter and enlarge it for his own residence, and she had been persuaded by Signora Venosta, who was always sighing for fresh salons to conquer, to remove (towards the close of the previous year) to apartments in the centre of the Parisian beau monde. Without formally professing to receive, on one evening in the week her salon was open to those who had eagerly sought her acquaintance--comprising many stars in the world of fashion, as well as those in the world of art and letters. And as she had now wholly abandoned the idea of the profession for which her voice had been cultivated, she no longer shrank from the exercise of her surpassing gift of song for the delight of private friends. Her physician had withdrawn the interdict on such exercise. His skill, aided by the rich vitality of her constitution, had triumphed over all tendencies to the malady for which he had been consulted. To hear Isaura

Cicogna sing in her own house was a privilege sought and prized by many who never read a word of her literary compositions. A good critic of a book is rare; but good judges of a voice are numberless. Adding this attraction of song to her youth, her beauty, her frank powers of converse--an innocent sweetness of manner free from all conventional affectation--and to the fresh novelty of a genius which inspired the young with enthusiasm and beguiled the old to indulgence, it was no wonder that Isaura became a celebrity at Paris.

Perhaps it was a wonder that her head was not turned by the adulation that surrounded her. But I believe, be it said with diffidence, that a woman of mind so superior that the mind never pretends to efface the heart, is less intoxicated with flattery than a man equally exposed to it.

It is the strength of her heart that keeps her head sober. Isaura had never yet overcome her first romance of love; as yet, amid all her triumphs, there was not a day in which her thoughts did not wistfully, mournfully, fly back to those blessed moments in which she felt her cheek colour before a look, her heart beat at the sound of a footfall. Perhaps if there had been the customary *_finis_* to this young romance--the lover's deliberate renunciation, his formal farewell--the girl's pride would ere this have conquered her affection,--possibly--who knows?--replaced it.

But, reader, be you male or female, have you ever known this sore trial of affection and pride, that from some cause or other, to you mysterious, the dear intercourse to which you had accustomed the secret life of your life, abruptly ceases; you know that a something has come between you and the beloved which you cannot distinguish, cannot measure, cannot guess, and therefore cannot surmount; and you say to yourself at the dead of solitary night, "Oh for an explanation! Oh for one meeting more! All might be so easily set right; or if not, I should know the worst, and knowing it, could conquer!"

This trial was Isaura's. There had been no explanation, no last farewell between her and Graham. She divined--no woman lightly makes a mistake there--that he loved her! She knew that this dread something had intervened between her and him when he took leave of her before others so many months ago; that this dread something still continued--what was it? She was certain that it would vanish, could they but once meet again and not before others. Oh for such a meeting!

She could not herself destroy hope. She could not marry another. She would have no heart to give to another while he was free, while in doubt if his heart was still her own. And thus her pride did not help her to conquer her affection.

Of Graham Vane she heard occasionally. He had ceased to correspond with Savarin; but among those who most frequented her salon were the Morleys. Americans so well educated and so well placed as the Morleys knew something about every Englishman of the social station of Graham Vane. Isaura learned from them that Graham, after a tour on the Continent, had

returned to England at the commencement of the year, had been invited to stand for Parliament, had refused, that his name was in the list published by the Morning Post of the elite whose arrivals in London, or whose presence at dinner-tables, is recorded as an event. That the Athenaeum had mentioned a rumour that Graham Vane was the author of a political pamphlet which, published anonymously, had made no inconsiderable sensation. Isaura sent to England for that pamphlet: the subject was somewhat dry, and the style, though clear and vigorous, was scarcely of the eloquence which wins the admiration of women; and yet she learned every word of it by heart.

We know how little she dreamed that the celebrity which she hailed as an approach to him was daily making her more remote. The sweet labours she undertook for that celebrity continued to be sweetened yet more by secret associations with the absent one. How many of the passages most admired could never have been written had he been never known!

And she blessed those labours the more that they upheld her from the absolute feebleness of sickened reverie, beguiled her from the gnawing torture of unsatisfied conjecture. She did comply with Madame de Grantmesnil's command--did pass from the dusty beaten road of life into green fields and along flowery river-banks, and did enjoy that ideal by-world.

But still the one image which reigned over her human heart moved beside her in the gardens of fairyland.

CHAPTER IV.

Isaura was seated in her pretty salon, with the Venosta, M. Savarin, the Morleys, and the financier Louvier, when Rameau was announced.

"Ha!" cried Savarin, "we were just discussing a matter which nearly concerns you, *_cher poete_*. I have not seen you since the announcement that Pierre Firmin is no other than Victor de Mauleon. *_Ma foi_*, that worthy seems likely to be as dangerous with his pen as he was once with his sword. The article in which he revealed himself makes a sharp lunge on the Government. 'Take care of yourself. When hawks and nightingales fly together the hawk may escape, and the nightingale complain of the barbarity of kings, in a cage: *'flebilitur gemens infelix avis.'*"

"He is not fit to conduct a journal," replied Rameau, magniloquently, "who will not brave a danger for his body in defence of the right to infinity for his thought."

"Bravo!" said Mrs. Morley, clapping her pretty hands. "That speech reminds me of home. The French are very much like the Americans in their style of oratory."

"So," said Louvier, "my old friend the Vicomte has come out as a writer,

a politician, a philosopher; I feel hurt that he kept this secret from me despite our intimacy. I suppose you knew it from the first, M. Rameau?"

"No, I was as much taken by surprise as the rest of the world. You have long known M. de Mauleon?"

"Yes, I may say we began life together--that is, much at the same time."

"What is he like in appearance?" asked Mrs. Morley. "The ladies thought him very handsome when he was young," replied Louvier. "He is still a fine-looking man, about my height."

"I should like to know him!" cried Mrs. Morley, "if only to tease that husband of mine. He refuses me the dearest of woman's rights.--I can't make him jealous."

"You may have the opportunity of knowing this *_ci-devant_* Lovelace very soon," said Rameau, "for he has begged me to present him to Mademoiselle Cicogna, and I will ask her permission to do so, on Thursday evening when she receives."

Isaura, who had hitherto attended very listlessly to the conversation, bowed assent. "Any friend of yours will be welcome. But I own the articles signed in the name of Pierre Firmin do not prepossess me in favour of their author."

"Why so?" asked Louvier; "surely you are not an Imperialist?"

"Nay, I do not pretend to be a politician at all, but there is something in the writing of Pierre Firmin that pains and chills me."

"Yet the secret of its popularity," said Savarin, "is that it says what every one says--only better."

"I see now that it is exactly that which displeases me; it is the Paris talk condensed into epigram: the graver it is the less it elevates--the lighter it is, the more it saddens."

"That is meant to hit me," said Savarin, with his sunny laugh--"me whom you call cynical."

"No, dear M. Savarin; for above all your cynicism is genuine gaiety, and below it solid kindness. You have that which I do not find in M. de Mauleon's writing, nor often in the talk of the salon--you have youthfulness."

"Youthfulness at sixty--flatterer!"

"Genius does not count its years by the almanac," said Mrs. Morley.

"I know what Isaura means--she is quite right; there is a breath of winter in M. de Mauleon's style, and an odour of fallen leaves. Not that his diction wants vigour; on the contrary, it is crisp with hoar-frost. But the sentiments conveyed by the diction are those of a nature sear and

withered. And it is in this combination of brisk words and decayed feelings that his writing represents the talk and mind of Paris. He and Paris are always fault-finding: fault-finding is the attribute of old age."

Colonel Morley looked round with pride, as much as to say, "Clever talker my wife."

Savarin understood that look, and replied to it courteously. "Madame has a gift of expression which Emile de Girardin can scarcely surpass. But when she blames us for fault-finding, can she expect the friends of liberty to praise the present style of things?"

"I should be obliged to the friends of liberty," said the Colonel, drily, "to tell me how that state of things is to be mended. I find no enthusiasm for the Orleanists, none for a Republic; people sneer at religion; no belief in a cause, no adherence to an opinion. But the worst of it is that, like all people who are _blases_, the Parisians are eager for strange excitement, and ready to listen to any oracle who promises a relief from indifferentism. This it is which makes the Press more dangerous in France than it is in any other country. Elsewhere the Press sometimes leads, sometimes follows, public opinion. Here there is no public opinion to consult, and instead of opinion the Press represents passion."

"My dear Colonel Morley," said Savarin, "I hear you very often say that a Frenchman cannot understand America. Permit me to observe that an American cannot understand France--or at least Paris. _Apropos_ of Paris that is a large speculation of yours, Louvier, in the new suburb."

"And a very sound one; I advise you to invest in it. I can secure you at present 5 per cent. on the rental; that is nothing--the houses will be worth double when the Rue de Louvier is completed."

"Alas! I have no money; my new journal absorbs all my capital."

"Shall I transfer the money I hold for you, Signorina, and add to them whatever you may have made by your delightful _roman_, as yet lying idle, to this investment? I cannot say more in its favour than this: I have embarked a very large portion of my capital in the Rue de Louvier, and I flatter myself that I am not one of those men who persuade their friends to do a foolish thing by setting them the example."

"Whatever you advise on such a subject," said Isaura, graciously, "is sure to be as wise as it is kind!"

"You consent, then?"

"Certainly."

Here the Venosta, who had been listening with great attention to Louvier's commendation of this investment, drew him aside, and whispered in his ear: "I suppose, M. Louvier, that one can't put a little money-a

very little money--poco-poco pocolino, into your street."

"Into my street! Ah, I understand--into the speculation of the Rue de Louvier! Certainly you can. Arrangements are made on purpose to suit the convenience of the smallest capitalists--from 500 francs upwards."

"And you feel quite sure that we shall double our money when the street is completed--I should not like to have my brains in my heels."

[*"Avere il cervello nella calcagna,"--viz., to act without prudent reflection.*]

"More than double it, I hope, long before the street is completed."

"I have saved a little money--very little. I have no relations, and I mean to leave it all to the Signorina; and if it could be doubled, why, there would be twice as much to leave her."

"So there would," said Louvier. "You can't do better than put it all into the Rue de Louvier. I will send you the necessary papers to-morrow, when I send hers to the Signorina."

Louvier here turned to address himself to Colonel Morley, but finding that degenerate son of America indisposed to get cent. per cent. for his money when offered by a Parisian, he very soon took his leave. The other visitors followed his example, except Rameau, who was left alone with the Venosta and Isaura. The former had no liking for Rameau, who showed her none of the attentions her innocent vanity demanded, and she soon took herself off to her own room to calculate the amount of her savings, and dream of the Rue de Louvier and "golden joys."

Rameau approaching his chair to Isaura's then commenced conversation, drily enough, upon pecuniary matters; acquitting himself of the mission with which De Mauleon had charged him, the request for a new work from her pen for the Sens Commun, and the terms that ought to be asked for compliance. The young lady-author shrank from this talk. Her private income, though modest, sufficed for her wants, and she felt a sensitive shame in the sale of her thoughts and fancies.

Putting hurriedly aside the mercantile aspect of the question, she said that she had no other work in her mind at present--that, whatever her vein of invention might be, it flowed at its own will, and could not be commanded.

"Nay," said Rameau, "this is not true. We fancy, in our hours of indolence, that we must wait for inspiration; but once force ourselves to work, and ideas spring forth at the wave of the pen. You may believe me here, I speak from experience: I, compelled to work, and in modes not to my taste--I do my task I know not how. I rub the lamp, 'the genius comes.'"

"I have read in some English author that motive power is necessary to continued labour: you have motive power, I have none."

"I do not quite understand you."

"I mean that a strong ruling motive is required to persist in any regular course of action that needs effort: the motive with the majority of men is the need of subsistence; with a large number (as in trades or professions), not actually want, but a desire of gain, and perhaps of distinction, in their calling: the desire of professional distinction expands into the longings for more comprehensive fame, more exalted honours, with the few who become great writers, soldiers, statesmen, orators."

"And do you mean to say you have no such motive?"

"None in the sting of want, none in the desire of gain."

"But fame?"

"Alas! I thought so once. I know not now--I begin to doubt if fame should be sought by women." This was said very dejectedly.

"Tut, dearest Signorina! what gadfly has stung you? Your doubt is a weakness unworthy of your intellect; and even were it not, genius is destiny and will be obeyed: you must write, despite yourself--and your writing must bring fame, whether you wish it or not."

Isaura was silent, her head drooped on her breast--there were tears in her downcast eyes.

Rameau took her hand, which she yielded to him passively, and clasping it in both his own, he rushed on impulsively--

"Oh, I know what these misgivings are when we feel ourselves solitary, unloved: how often have they been mine! But how different would labour be if shared and sympathised with by a congenial mind, by a heart that beats in unison with one's own!"

Isaura's breast heaved beneath her robe, she sighed softly.

"And then how sweet the fame of which the one we love is proud! how trifling becomes the pang of some malignant depreciation, which a word from the beloved one can soothe! O Signorina! O Isaura! are we not made for each other? Kindred pursuits, hopes, and fears in common; the same race to run, the same goal to win! I need a motive stronger than I have yet known for the persevering energy that insures success: supply to me that motive. Let me think that whatever I win in the strife of the world is a tribute to Isaura. No, do not seek to withdraw this hand, let me claim it as mine for life. I love you as man never loved before--do not reject my love."

They say the woman who hesitates is lost. Isaura hesitated, but was not yet lost. The words she listened to moved her deeply. Offers of marriage she had already received: one from a rich middle-aged noble,

a devoted musical virtuoso; one from a young avocat fresh from the provinces, and somewhat calculating on her dot; one from a timid but enthusiastic admirer of her genius and her beauty, himself rich, handsome, of good birth, but with shy manners and faltering tongue.

But these had made their proposals with the formal respect habitual to French decorum in matrimonial proposals. Words so eloquently impassioned as Gustave Rameau's had never before thrilled her ears; Yes, she was deeply moved; and yet, by that very emotion she knew that it was not to the love of this wooer that her heart responded.

There is a circumstance in the history of courtship familiar to the experience of many women, that while the suitor is pleading his cause, his language may touch every fibre in the heart of his listener, yet substitute, as it were, another presence for his own. She may be saying to herself, "Oh that another had said those words!" and be dreaming of the other, while she hears the one. Thus it was with Isaura, and not till Rameau's voice had ceased did that dream pass away, and with a slight shiver she turned her face towards the wooer sadly and pityingly. "It cannot be," she said, in a low whisper; "I were not worthy of your love could I accept it. Forget that you have so spoken; let me still be a friend admiring your genius, interested in your career. I cannot be more. Forgive me if I unconsciously led you to think I could, I am so grieved to pain you."

"Am I to understand," said Rameau, coldly, for his *_amour propre_* was resentful, "that the proposals of another have been more fortunate than mine?" And he named the youngest and comeliest of those whom she had rejected. "Certainly not," said Isaura.

Rameau rose and went to the window, turning his face from her. In reality he was striving to collect his thoughts and decide on the course it were most prudent for him now to pursue. The fumes of the absinthe which had, despite his previous forebodings, emboldened him to hazard his avowal, had now subsided into the languid reaction which is generally consequent on that treacherous stimulus, a reaction not unfavourable to passionless reflection. He knew that if he said he could not conquer his love, he would still cling to hope, and trust to perseverance and time, he should compel Isaura to forbid his visits and break off their familiar intercourse. This would be fatal to the chance of yet winning her, and would also be of serious disadvantage to his more worldly interests. Her literary aid might become essential to the journal on which his fortunes depended; and at all events, in her conversation, in her encouragement, in her sympathy with the pains and joys of his career, he felt a support, a comfort, nay, an inspiration. For the spontaneous gush of her fresh thoughts and fancies served to recruit his own jaded ideas, and enlarge his own stunted range of invention. No, he could not commit himself to the risk of banishment from Isaura.

And mingled with meaner motives for discretion, there was one of which he was but vaguely conscious, purer and nobler. In the society of this girl, in whom whatever was strong and high in mental organisation became so sweetened into feminine grace by gentleness of temper and kindness

of disposition, Rameau felt himself a better man. The virgin-like dignity with which she moved, so untainted by a breath of scandal, amid salons in which the envy of virtues doubted sought to bring innocence itself into doubt, warmed into a genuine reverence the cynicism of his professed creed.

While with her, while under her chastening influence, he was sensible of a poetry infused within him far more true to the Camoenae than all he had elaborated into verse. In these moments he was ashamed of the vices he had courted as distractions. He imagined that with her all his own, it would be easy to reform.

No; to withdraw wholly from Isaura was to renounce his sole chance of redemption.

While these thoughts, which it takes so long to detail, passed rapidly through his brain, he felt a soft touch on his arm, and, turning his face slowly, encountered the tender, compassionate eyes of Isaura.

"Be consoled, dear friend," she said, with a smile, half cheering, half mournful. "Perhaps for all true artists the solitary lot is the best."

"I will try to think so," answered Rameau; "and meanwhile I thank you with a full heart for the sweetness with which you have checked my presumption--the presumption shall not be repeated. Gratefully I accept the friendship you deign to tender me. You bid me forget the words I uttered. Promise in turn that you will forget them--or at least consider them withdrawn. You will receive me still as friend?"

"As friend, surely: yes. Do we not both need friends?" She held out her hand as she spoke; he bent over it, kissed it with respect, and the interview thus closed.

CHAPTER V.

It was late in the evening that day when a man who had the appearance of a decent bourgeois, in the lower grades of that comprehensive class, entered one of the streets in the Faubourg Montmartre, tenanted chiefly by artisans. He paused at the open doorway of a tall narrow house, and drew back as he heard footsteps descending a very gloomy staircase.

The light from a gas lamp on the street fell full on the face of the person thus quitting the house--the face of a young and handsome man, dressed with the quiet elegance which betokened one of higher rank or fashion than that neighbourhood was habituated to find among its visitors. The first comer retreated promptly into the shade, and, as by sudden impulse, drew his hat low down over his eyes.

The other man did not, however, observe him, went his way with a quick step along the street, and entered another house some yards distant.

"What can that pious Bourbonite do here?" muttered the first comer.
"Can he be a conspirator? Diable! 'tis as dark as Erebus on that staircase."

Taking cautious hold of the banister, the man now ascended the stairs. On the landing of the first floor there was a gas lamp which threw upward a faint ray that finally died at the third story. But at that third story the man's journey ended; he pulled a bell at the door to the right, and in another moment or so the door was opened by a young woman of twenty-eight or thirty, dressed very simply, but with a certain neatness not often seen in the wives of artisans in the Faubourg Montmartre. Her face, which, though pale and delicate, retained much of the beauty of youth, became clouded as she recognised the visitor; evidently the visit was not welcome to her.

"Monsieur Lebeau again!" she exclaimed, shrinking back.

"At your service, _chere dame_. The goodman is of course at home? Ah, I catch sight of him," and sliding by the woman, M. Lebeau passed the narrow lobby in which she stood, through the open door conducting into the room in which Armand Monnier was seated, his chin propped on his hand, his elbow resting on a table, looking abstractedly into space. In a corner of the room two small children were playing languidly with a set of bone tablets, inscribed with the letters of the alphabet. But whatever the children were doing with the alphabet, they were certainly not learning to read from it.

The room was of fair size and height, and by no means barely or shabbily furnished. There was a pretty clock on the mantelpiece. On the wall were hung designs for the decoration of apartments, and shelves on which were ranged a few books.

The window was open, and on the sill were placed flowerpots; you could scent the odour they wafted into the room. Altogether it was an apartment suited to a skilled artisan earning high wages. From the room we are now in, branched on one side a small but commodious kitchen; on the other side, on which the door was screened by a portiere, with a border prettily worked by female hands--some years ago, for it was faded now--was a bedroom, communicating with one of less size in which the children slept. We do not enter those additional rooms, but it may be well here to mention them as indications of the comfortable state of an intelligent skilled artisan of Paris, who thinks he can better that state by some revolution which may ruin his employer.

Monnier started up at the entrance of Lebeau, and his face showed that he did not share the dislike to the visit which that of the female partner of his life had evinced. On the contrary, his smile was cordial, and there was a hearty ring in the voice which cried out--

"I am glad to see you--something to do? Eh!"

"Always ready to work for liberty, _mon brave_."

"I hope so: what's in the wind now?"

"O Armand, be prudent--be prudent!" cried the woman, piteously. "Do not lead him into further mischief, Monsieur Lebeau;" as she faltered forth the last words, she bowed her head over the two little ones, and her voice died in sobs.

"Monnier," said Lebeau, gravely, "Madame is right. I ought not to lead you into further mischief; there are three in the room who have better claims on you than--"

"The cause of millions," interrupted Monnier.

"No."

He approached the woman and took up one of the children very tenderly, stroking back its curls and kissing the face, which, if before surprised and saddened by the mother's sob, now smiled gaily under the father's kiss.

"Canst thou doubt, my Heloise," said the artisan, mildly, "that whatever I do thou and these are not uppermost in my thoughts? I act for thine interest and theirs--the world as it exists is the foe of you three. The world I would replace it by will be more friendly."

The poor woman made no reply, but as he drew her towards him, she leant her head upon his breast and wept quietly. Monnier led her thus from the room, whispering words of soothing. The children followed the parents into the adjoining chamber. In a few minutes Monnier returned, shutting the door behind him, and drawing the portiere close.

"You will excuse me, Citizen, and my poor wife--wife she is to me and to all who visit here, though the law says she is not."

"I respect Madame the more for her dislike to myself," said Lebeau, with a somewhat melancholy smile.

"Not dislike to you personally, Citizen, but dislike to the business which she connects with your visits, and she is more than usually agitated on that subject this evening, because, just before you came, another visitor had produced a great effect on her feelings--poor dear Heloise!"

"Indeed! how?"

"Well, I was employed in the winter in redecorating the salon, and boudoir, of Madame de Vandemar; her son, M. Raoul, took great interest in superintending the details. He would sometimes talk to me very civilly, not only on my work, but on other matters. It seems that Madame now wants something done to the _salle-a-manger_, and asked old Gerard--my late master, you know--to send me. Of course he said that was impossible--for, though I was satisfied with my own wages, I had induced

his other men to strike, and was one of the ringleaders in the recent strike of artisans in general--a dangerous man, and he would have nothing more to do with me. So M. Raoul came to see and talk to me--scarce gone before you rang at the bell--you might have almost met him on the stairs."

"I saw a beau monsieur come out of the house. And so his talk has affected Madame."

"Very much; it was quite brother-like. He is one of the religious set, and they always get at the weak side of the soft sex."

"Ay," said Lebeau, thoughtfully; "if religion were banished from the laws of men, it would still find a refuge in the hearts of women. But Raoul de Vandemar did not presume to preach to Madame upon the sin of loving you and your children?"

"I should like to have heard him preach to her," cried Monnier, fiercely.

"No, he only tried to reason with me about matters he could not understand."

"Strikes?"

"Well, not exactly strikes--he did not contend that we workmen had not full right to combine and to strike for obtaining fairer money's worth for our work; but he tried to persuade me that where, as in my case, it was not a matter of wages, but of political principle--of war against capitalists--I could but injure myself and mislead others. He wanted to reconcile me to old Gerard, or to let him find me employment elsewhere; and when I told him that my honour forbade me to make terms for myself till those with whom I was joined were satisfied, he said, 'But if this lasts much longer, your children will not look so rosy;' then poor Heloise began to wring her hands and cry, and he took me aside and wanted to press money on me--as a loan. He spoke so kindly that I could not be angry; but when he found I would take nothing, he asked me about some families in the street of whom he had a list, and who, he was informed, were in great distress. That is true; I am feeding some of them myself out of my savings. You see, this young Monsieur belongs to a society of men, many as young as he is, which visits the poor and dispenses charity. I did not feel I had a right to refuse aid for others, and I told him where his money would be best spent. I suppose he went there when he left me."

"I know the society you mean, that of St. Francois de Sales. It comprises some of the most ancient of that old noblesse to which the ouvriers in the great Revolution were so remorseless."

"We ouvriers are wiser now; we see that in assailing them, we gave ourselves worse tyrants in the new aristocracy of the capitalists. Our quarrel now is that of artisans against employers."

"Of course, I am aware of that; but to leave general politics, tell me frankly, How has the strike affected you as yet? I mean in purse? Can

you stand its pressure? If not, you are above the false pride of not taking help from me, a fellow-conspirator, though you were justified in refusing it when offered by Raoul de Vandemar, the servant of the Church."

"Pardon, I refuse aid from any one, except for the common cause. But do not fear for me, I am not pinched as yet. I have had high wages for some years, and since I and Heloise came together, I have not wasted a sous out of doors, except in the way of public duty, such as making converts at the Jean Jacques and elsewhere; a glass of beer and a pipe don't cost much. And Heloise is such a house-wife, so thrifty, scolds me if I buy her a ribbon, poor love! No wonder that I would pull down a society that dares to scoff at her--dares to say she is not my wife, and her children are base born. No, I have some savings left yet. War to society, war to the knife!"

"Monnier," said Lebeau, in a voice that evinced emotion, "listen to me: I have received injuries from society which, when they were fresh, half-maddened me--that is twenty years ago. I would then have thrown myself into any plot against society that proffered revenge; but society, my friend, is a wall of very strong masonry, as it now stands; it may be sapped in the course of a thousand years, but stormed in a day--no. You dash your head against it--you scatter your brains, and you dislodge a stone. Society smiles in scorn, effaces the stain, and replaces the stone. I no longer war against society. I do war against a system in that society which is hostile to me--systems in France are easily overthrown. I say this because I want to use you, and I do not want to deceive."

"Deceive me, bah! You are an honest man," cried Monnier; and he seized Lebeau's hand, and shook it with warmth and vigour.

"But for you I should have been a mere grumbler. No doubt I should have cried out where the shoe pinched, and railed against laws that vex me; but from the moment you first talked to me I became a new man. You taught me to act, as Rousseau and Madame de Grantmesnil had taught me to think and to feel. There is my brother, a grumbler too, but professes to have a wiser head than mine. He is always warning me against you--against joining a strike--against doing any thing to endanger my skin. I always went by his advice till you taught me that it was well enough for women to talk and complain; men should dare and do."

"Nevertheless," said Lebeau, "your brother is a safer counsellor to a pere de famille than I. I repeat what I have so often said before: I desire, and I resolve, that the Empire of M. Bonaparte shall be overthrown. I see many concurrent circumstances to render that desire and resolve of practicable fulfilment. You desire and resolve the same thing. Up to that point we can work together. I have encouraged your action only so far as it served my design; but I separate from you the moment you would ask me to aid your design in the hazard of experiments which the world has never yet favoured, and trust me, Monnier, the world never will favour."

"That remains to be seen," said Monnier, with compressed, obstinate lips.
"Forgive me, but you are not young; you belong to an old school."

"Poor young man!" said Lebeau, readjusting his spectacles, "I recognise in you the genius of Paris, be the genius good or evil. Paris is never warned by experience. Be it so. I want you so much, your enthusiasm is so fiery, that I can concede no more to the mere sentiment which makes me say to myself, 'It is a shame to use this great-hearted, wrong-headed creature for my personal ends.' I come at once to the point--that is, the matter on which I seek you this evening. At my suggestion, you have been a ringleader in strikes which have terribly shaken the Imperial system, more than its Ministers deem; now I want a man like you to assist in a bold demonstration against the Imperial resort to a rural priest-ridden suffrage, on the part of the enlightened working class of Paris."

"Good!" said Monnier.

"In a day or two the result of the plebiscite will be known. The result of universal suffrage will be enormously in favour of the desire expressed by one man."

"I don't believe it," said Monnier, stoutly. "France cannot be so hoodwinked by the priests."

"Take what I say for granted," resumed Lebeau, calmly. "On the 8th of this month we shall know the amount of the majority--some millions of French votes. I want Paris to separate itself from France, and declare against those blundering millions. I want an emeute, or rather a menacing demonstration--not a premature revolution, mind. You must avoid bloodshed."

"It is easy to say that beforehand; but when a crowd of men once meets in the streets of Paris--"

"It can do much by meeting, and cherishing resentment if the meeting be dispersed by an armed force, which it would be waste of life to resist."

"We shall see when the time comes," said Monnier, with a fierce gleam in his bold eyes.

"I tell you, all that is required at this moment is an evident protest of the artisans of Paris against the votes of the 'rurals' of France. Do you comprehend me?"

"I think so; if not, I obey. What we ouvriers want is what we have not got--a head to dictate action to us."

"See to this, then. Rouse the men you can command. I will take care that you have plentiful aid from foreigners. We may trust to the confreres of our council to enlist Poles and Italians; Gaspard le Noy will turn out the volunteer rioters at his command. Let the emeute be within, say a week, after the vote of the plebiscite is taken. You will need that time to prepare."

"Be contented--it shall be done."

"Good night, then." Lebeau leisurely took up his hat and drew on his gloves--then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he turned briskly on the artisan and said in quick blunt tones:

"Armand Monnier, explain to me why it is that you--a Parisian artisan, the type of a class the most insubordinate, the most self-conceited that exists on the face of earth--take without question, with so docile a submission, the orders of a man who plainly tells you he does not sympathise in your ultimate objects, of whom you really know very little, and whose views you candidly own you think are those of an old and obsolete school of political reasoners."

"You puzzle me to explain," said Monnier, with an ingenuous laugh, that brightened up features stern and hard, though comely when in repose. "Partly, because you are so straightforward, and do not talk *_blague_*; partly, because I don't think the class I belong to would stir an inch unless we had a leader of another class--and you give me at least that leader. Again, you go to that first stage which we all agree to take, and--well, do you want me to explain more?"

"Yes."

"*_Et bien_!* you have warned me, like an honest man; like an honest man I warn you. That first step we take together; I want to go a step further; you retreat, you say, 'No.' I reply you are committed; that further step you must take, or I cry '*_Traître_!*--*_au la lanterne_!*' You talk of 'superior experience:' bah! what does experience really tell you? Do you suppose that Philippe Egalite, when he began to plot against Louis XVI., meant to vote for his kinsman's execution by the guillotine? Do you suppose that Robespierre, when he commenced his career as the foe of capital punishment, foresaw that he should be the Minister of the Reign of Terror? Not a bit of it. Each was committed by his use of those he designed for his tools: so must you be--or you perish."

Lebeau, leaning against the door, heard the frank avowal he had courted without betraying a change of countenance. But when Armand Monnier had done, a slight movement of his lips showed emotion; was it of fear or disdain?

"Monnier," he said, gently; "I am so much obliged to you for the manly speech you have made. The scruples which my conscience had before entertained are dispelled. I dreaded lest I, a declared wolf, might seduce into peril an innocent sheep. I see I have to deal with a wolf of younger vigour and sharper fangs than myself, so much the better: obey my orders now; leave it to time to say whether I obey yours later. *_Au revoir_.*"

CHAPTER VI.

Isaura's apartment, on the following Thursday evening, was more filled than usual. Besides her habitual devotees in the artistic or literary world, there were diplomatists and deputies commixed with many fair chiefs of *la jeunesse doree*; amongst the latter the brilliant Enguerrand de Vandemar, who, deeming the acquaintance of every celebrity essential to his own celebrity in either Carthage, the *beau monde*, or the *demi-monde*, had, two Thursdays before, made Louvier attend her soiree and present him. Louvier, though gathering to his own salons authors and artists, very rarely favoured their rooms with his presence; he did not adorn Isaura's party that evening. But Duplessis was there, in compensation. It had chanced that Valerie had met Isaura at some house in the past winter, and conceived an enthusiastic affection for her: since then, Valerie came very often to see her, and made a point of dragging with her to Isaura's Thursday reunions her obedient father. Soirees, musical or literary, were not much in his line; but he had no pleasure like that of pleasing his spoilt child. Our old friend Frederic Lemercier was also one of Isaura's guests that night. He had become more and more intimate with Duplessis, and Duplessis had introduced him to the fair Valerie as "*un jeune homme plein de moyens, qui ira loin*."

Savarin was there of course, and brought with him an English gentleman of the name of Bevil, as well known at Paris as in London--invited everywhere--popular everywhere--one of those welcome contributors to the luxuries of civilised society who trade in gossip, sparing no pains to get the pick of it, and exchanging it liberally sometimes for a haunch of venison, sometimes for a cup of tea. His gossip not being adulterated with malice was in high repute for genuine worth.

If Bevil said, "This story is a fact," you no more thought of doubting him than you would doubt Rothschild if he said, "This is Lafitte of '48."

Mr. Bevil was at present on a very short stay at Paris, and, naturally wishing to make the most of his time, he did not tarry beside Savarin, but, after being introduced to Isaura, flitted here and there through the assembly.

"*Apis Matinae--
More modoque--
Grata carpentis thyma*"--

The bee proffers honey, but bears a sting.

The room was at its fullest when Gustave Rameau entered, accompanied by Monsieur de Mauleon.

Isaura was agreeably surprised by the impression made on her by the Vicomte's appearance and manner. His writings, and such as she had heard of his earlier repute, had prepared her to see a man decidedly old, of withered aspect and sardonic smile--aggressive in demeanour--forward or contemptuous in his very politeness--a Mephistopheles engrafted on the stem of a Don Juan. She was startled by the sight of one who, despite

his forty-eight years--and at Paris a man is generally older at forty-eight than he is elsewhere--seemed in the zenith of ripened manhood--startled yet more by the singular modesty of a deportment too thoroughly high-bred not to be quietly simple--startled most by a melancholy expression in eyes that could be at times soft, though always so keen, and in the grave pathetic smile which seemed to disarm censure of past faults in saying, "I have known sorrows."

He did not follow up his introduction to his young hostess by any of the insipid phrases of compliment to which she was accustomed; but, after expressing in grateful terms his thanks for the honour she had permitted Rameau to confer on him, he moved aside, as if he had no right to detain her from other guests more worthy her notice, towards the doorway, taking his place by Enguerrand amidst a group of men of whom Duplessis was the central figure.

At that time--the first week in May, 1870--all who were then in Paris will remember that there were two subjects uppermost in the mouths of men: first, the plebiscite; secondly, the conspiracy to murder the Emperor--which the disaffected considered to be a mere fable, a pretence got up in time to serve the plebiscite and prop the Empire.

Upon this latter subject Duplessis had been expressing himself with unwonted animation. A loyal and earnest Imperialist, it was only with effort that he could repress his scorn of that meanest sort of gossip which is fond of ascribing petty motives to eminent men.

To him nothing could be more clearly evident than the reality of this conspiracy, and he had no tolerance for the malignant absurdity of maintaining that the Emperor or his Ministers could be silly and wicked enough to accuse seventy-two persons of a crime which the police had been instructed to invent.

As De Mauleon approached, the financier brought his speech to an abrupt close. He knew in the Vicomte de Mauleon the writer of articles which had endangered the Government, and aimed no pointless shafts against its Imperial head.

"My cousin," said Enguerrand, gaily, as he exchanged a cordial shake of the hand with Victor, "I congratulate you on the fame of journalist, into which you have vaulted, armed cap-a-pie, like a knight of old into his saddle; but I don't sympathise with the means you have taken to arrive at that renown. I am not myself an Imperialist--a Vandemar can be scarcely that. But if I am compelled to be on board a ship, I don't wish to take out its planks and let in an ocean, when all offered to me instead is a crazy tub and a rotten rope."

"_Tres bien_," said Duplessis, in Parliamentary tone and phrase.

"But," said De Mauleon, with his calm smile, "would you like the captain of the ship, when the sky darkened and the sea rose, to ask the common sailors 'whether they approved his conduct on altering his course or shortening his sail'? Better trust to a crazy tub and a rotten rope than

to a ship in which the captain consults a plebiscite."

"Monsieur," said Duplessis, "your metaphor is ill chosen no metaphor indeed is needed. The head of the State was chosen by the voice of the people, and, when required to change the form of administration which the people had sanctioned, and inclined to do so from motives the most patriotic and liberal, he is bound again to consult the people from whom he holds his power. It is not, however, of the plebiscite we were conversing, so much as of the atrocious conspiracy of assassins--so happily discovered in time. I presume that Monsieur de Mauleon must share the indignation which true Frenchmen of every party must feel against a combination united by the purpose of murder."

The Vicomte bowed as in assent. "But do you believe," asked a Liberal Depute, "that such a combination existed, except in the visions of the police or the cabinet of a Minister?"

Duplessis looked keenly at De Mauleon while this question was put to him. Belief or disbelief in the conspiracy was with him, and with many, the test by which a sanguinary revolutionist was distinguished from an honest politician.

"Ma foi," answered De Mauleon, shrugging his shoulders, "I have only one belief left; but that is boundless. I believe in the folly of mankind in general, and of Frenchmen in particular. That seventy-two men should plot the assassination of a sovereign on whose life interests so numerous and so watchful depend, and imagine they could keep a secret which any drunkard amongst them would blab out, any tatterdemalion would sell, is a betise so gross that I think it highly probable. But pardon me if I look upon the politics of Paris much as I do upon its mud--one must pass through it when one walks in the street. One changes one's shoes before entering the salon. A word with you, Enguerrand,"--and taking his kinsman's arm he drew him aside from the circle. "What has become of your brother? I see nothing of him now."

"Oh, Raoul," answered Enguerrand, throwing himself on a couch in a recess, and making room for De Mauleon beside him--"Raoul is devoting himself to the distressed ouvriers who have chosen to withdraw from work. When he fails to persuade them to return, he forces food and fuel on their wives and children. My good mother encourages him in this costly undertaking, and no one but you who believe in the infinity of human folly would credit me when I tell you that his eloquence has drawn from me all the argent de poche I get from our shop. As for himself, he has sold his horses, and even grudges a cab-fare, saying, 'That is a meal for a family.' Ah! if he had but gone into the Church, what a saint would have deserved canonisation!"

"Do not lament--he will probably have what is a better claim than mere sainthood on Heaven--martyrdom," said De Mauleon, with a smile in which sarcasm disappeared in melancholy. "Poor Raoul!--and what of my other cousin, the beau Marquis? Several months ago his Legitimist faith seemed vacillating--he talked to me very fairly about the duties a Frenchman owed to France, and hinted that he should place his sword at

the command of Napoleon III. I have not yet heard of him as a _soldat de France_--I hear a great deal of him as a _viveur de Paris_."

"Don't you know why his desire for a military career was frost-bitten?"

"No! why?"

"Alain came from Bretagne profoundly ignorant of most things known to a _gamin_ of Paris. When he conscientiously overcame the scruples natural to one of his name and told the Duchesse de Tarascon that he was ready to fight under the flag of France whatever its colour, he had a vague reminiscence of ancestral Rochebriants earning early laurels at the head of their regiments. At all events he assumed as a matter of course that he, in the first rank as _gentilhomme_, would enter the army, if as a _sous-lieutenant_, still as _gentilhomme_. But when told that, as he had been at no military college, he could only enter the ranks as a private soldier--herd with private soldiers--for at least two years before, passing through the grade of corporal, his birth, education, habits of life could, with great favour, raise him to the station of a sous-lieutenant, you may conceive that the martial ardour of a Rochebriant was somewhat cooled."

"If he knew what the dormitory of French privates is, and how difficult a man well educated well brought up, finds it, first, to endure the coarsest ribaldry and the loudest blasphemy, and then, having endured and been compelled to share them, ever enforce obedience and discipline as a superior among those with whom just before he was an equal, his ardour would not have been merely cooled--it would have been changed into despair for the armies of France, if hereafter they are met by those whose officers have been trained to be officers from the outset and have imbibed from their cradle an education not taught to the boy-pedants from school--the two-fold education how with courtesy to command, how with dignity to obey. To return to Rochebriant, such salons as I frequent are somewhat formal--as befits my grave years and my modest income; I may add, now that you know my vocation, befits me also as a man who seeks rather to be instructed than amused. In those salons I did, last year sometimes, however, meet Rochebriant--as I sometimes still meet you; but of late he has deserted such sober reunions, and I hear with pain that he is drifting among those rocks against which my own youth was shipwrecked. Is the report true?"

"I fear," said Enguerrand, reluctantly, "that at least the report is not unfounded. And my conscience accuses me of having been to blame in the first instance. You see, when Alain made terms with Louvier by which he obtained a very fair income, if prudently managed, I naturally wished that a man of so many claims to social distinction, and who represents the oldest branch of my family, should take his right place in our world of Paris. I gladly therefore presented him to the houses and the men most _a la mode_--advised him as to the sort of establishment, in apartments, horses, &c., which it appeared to me that he might reasonably afford--I mean such as, with his means, I should have prescribed to myself--"

"Ah! I understand. But you, dear Enguerrand, are a born Parisian, every inch of you: and a born Parisian is, whatever be thought to the contrary, the best manager in the world. He alone achieves the difficult art of uniting thrift with show. It is your Provincial who comes to Paris in the freshness of undimmed youth, who sows his whole life on its barren streets. I guess the rest: Alain is ruined." Enguerrand, who certainly was so far a born Parisian that with all his shrewdness and *savoir faire*, he had a wonderfully sympathetic heart, very easily moved, one way or the other--Enguerrand winced at his elder kinsman's words complimentarily reproachful, and said in unwonted tones of humility: "Cousin, you are cruel, but you are in the right. I did not calculate sufficiently on the chances of Alain's head being turned. Hear my excuse. He seemed to me so much more thoughtful than most at our age are, so much more stately and proud; well, also so much more pure, so impressed with the responsibilities of station, so bent on retaining the old lands in Bretagne; by habit and rearing so simple and self-denying, --that I took it for granted he was proof against stronger temptations than those which a light nature like my own puts aside with a laugh. And at first I had no reason to think myself deceived, when, some months ago, I heard that he was getting into debt, losing at play, paying court to female vampires, who drain the life-blood of those on whom they fasten their fatal lips. Oh, then I spoke to him earnestly!"

"And in vain?"

"In vain. A certain Chevalier de Finisterre, whom you may have heard of--"

"Certainly, and met; a friend of Louvier's--"

"The same man--has obtained over him an influence which so far subdues mine, that he almost challenged me when I told him his friend was a scamp. In fine, though Alain and I have not actually quarrelled, we pass each other with, '*Bon jour, mon ami.*'"

"Hum! My dear Enguerrand, you have done all you could. Flies will be flies, and spiders, spiders, till the earth is destroyed by a comet. Nay, I met a distinguished naturalist in America who maintained that we shall find flies and spiders in the next world."

"You have been in America? Ah, true--I remember, California!"

"Where have I not been? Tush! music--shall I hear our fair hostess sing?"

"I am afraid not to-night: because Madame S----- is to favour us, and the Signorina makes it a rule not to sing at her own house when professional artists do. You must hear the Cicogna quietly some day; such a voice, nothing like it."

Madame S-----, who, since she had learned that there was no cause to apprehend that Isaura might become her professional rival, conceived for her a wonderful affection, and willingly contributed her magnificent

gifts of song to the charms of Isaura's salon, now began a fragment from *l Puritani*, which held the audience as silent as the ghosts listening to Sappho, and when it was over, several of the guests slipped away, especially those who disliked music, and feared Madame S----- might begin again. Enguerrand was not one of such soulless recreants, but he had many other places to go to. Besides, Madame S----- was no novelty to him.

De Mauleon now approached Isaura, who was seated next to Valerie, and after well-merited encomium on Madame S-----'s performance, slid into some critical comparisons between that singer and those of a former generation, which interested Isaura, and evinced to her quick perceptions that kind of love for music which has been refined by more knowledge of the art than is common to mere amateurs.

"You have studied music, Monsieur de Mauleon," she said. "Do you not perform yourself?"

"I? No. But music has always had a fatal attraction for me. I ascribe half the errors of my life to that temperament which makes me too fascinated by harmonies--too revolted by discords."

"I should have thought such a temperament would have led from errors--are not errors discords?"

"To the inner sense, yes; but to the outer sense not always. Virtues are often harsh to the ear--errors very sweet-voiced. The sirens did not sing out of tune. Better to stop one's ears than glide on Scylla or be merged into Charybdis."

"Monsieur," cried Valerie, with a pretty *brusquerie* which became her well, "you talk like a Vandal."

"It is, I think, by Mademoiselle Duplessis that I have the honour to be rebuked. Is Monsieur your father very susceptible to music?"

"Well, I cannot say that he cares much for it. But then his mind is so practical--"

"And his life so successful. No Scylla, no Charybdis for him. However, Mademoiselle, I am not quite the Vandal you suppose, I do not say that susceptibility to the influence of music may not be safe, nay, healthful, to others it was not so to me in my youth. It can do me no harm now."

Here Duplessis came up and whispered his daughter "it was time to leave; they had promised the Duchesse de Tarascon to assist at the soiree she gave that night." Valerie took her father's arm with a brightening smile and a heightened colour. Alain de Rochebriant might probably be at the Duchesse's.

"Are you not going also to the Hotel de Tarascon, M. de Mauleon?" asked Duplessis.

"No; I was never there but once. The Duchesse is an Imperialist, at once devoted and acute, and no doubt very soon divined my lack of faith in her idols."

Duplessis frowned, and hastily led Valerie away.

In a few minutes the room was comparatively deserted. De Mauleon, however, lingered by the side of Isaura till all the other guests were gone. Even then he lingered still, and renewed the interrupted conversation with her, the Venosta joining therein; and so agreeable did he make himself to her Italian tastes by a sort of bitter-sweet wisdom like that of her native proverbs--comprising much knowledge of mankind on the unflattering side of humanity in that form of pleasantry which has a latent sentiment of pathos--that the Venosta exclaimed, "Surely you must have been brought up in Florence!"

There was that in De Mauleon's talk hostile to all which we call romance that excited the imagination of Isaura, and compelled her instinctive love for whatever is more sweet, more beautiful, more ennobling on the many sides of human life, to oppose what she deemed the paradoxes of a man who had taught himself to belie even his own nature. She became eloquent, and her countenance, which in ordinary moments owed much of its beauty to an expression of meditative gentleness, was now lighted up by the energy of earnest conviction--the enthusiasm of an impassioned zeal.

Gradually De Mauleon relaxed his share in the dialogue, and listened to her, rapt and dreamily as in his fiery youth he had listened to the songs of the sirens. No siren Isaura! She was defending her own cause, though unconsciously--defending the vocation of art as the embellisher of external nature, and more than embellisher of the nature which dwells crude, but plastic in the soul of man: indeed therein the creator of a new nature, strengthened, expanded, and brightened in proportion as it accumulates the ideas that tend beyond the boundaries of the visible and material nature, which is finite; for ever seeking in the unseen and the spiritual the goals in the infinite which it is their instinct to divine.

"That which you contemptuously call romance," said Isaura, "is not essential only to poets and artists. The most real side of every life, from the earliest dawn of mind in the infant, is the romantic."

"When the child is weaving flower-chains, chasing butterflies, or sitting apart and dreaming what it will do in the future, is not that the child's real life, and yet is it not also the romantic?"

"But there comes a time when we weave no flower-chains, and chase no butterflies."

"Is it so?--still on one side of life, flowers and butterflies may be found to the last; and at least to the last are there no dreams of the future? Have you no such dreams at this moment? and without the romance of such dreams, would there be any reality to human life which could distinguish it from the life of the weed that rots on Lethe?"

"Alas, Mademoiselle," said De Mauleon, rising to take leave, "your

argument must rest without answer. I would not, if I could, confute the beautiful belief that belongs to youth, fusing into one rainbow all the tints that can colour the world. But the Signora Venosta will acknowledge the truth of an old saying expressed in every civilised language, but best, perhaps in that of the Florentine--'You might as well physic the dead as instruct the old.'

"But you are not old!" said the Venosta, with Florentine politeness,--"you! not a grey hair."

"'Tis not by the grey of the hair that one knows the age of the heart," answered De Mauleon, in another paraphrase of Italian proverb, and he was gone.

As he walked homeward, through deserted streets, Victor de Mauleon thought to himself, "Poor girl, how I pity her! married to a Gustave Rameau--married to any man--nothing in the nature of man, be he the best and the cleverest, can ever realise the dream of a girl who is pure and has genius. Ah, is not the converse true? What girl, the best and the cleverest, comes up to the ideal of even a commonplace man--if he ever dreamed of an ideal!"

Then he paused, and in a moment or so afterwards his thought knew such questionings no more. It turned upon personalities, on stratagems and plots, on ambition. The man had more than his share of that peculiar susceptibility which is one of the characteristics of his countrymen--susceptibility to immediate impulse--susceptibility to fleeting impressions. It was a key to many mysteries in his character when he owned his subjection to the influence of music, and in music recognised not the seraph's harp, but the siren's song. If you could have permanently fixed Victor de Mauleon in one of the good moments of his life--even now--some moment of exquisite kindness--of superb generosity--of dauntless courage--you would have secured a very rare specimen of noble humanity. But so to fix him was impossible.

That impulse of the moment vanished the moment after; swept aside by the force of his very talents--talents concentrated by his intense sense of individuality--sense of wrongs or of rights--interests or objects personal to himself. He extended the royal saying, "_L'etat, c'est moi_" to words far more grandiloquent. "The universe, 'tis I." The Venosta would have understood him and smiled approvingly, if he had said with good-humoured laugh, "I dead, the world is dead!" That is an Italian proverb, and means much the same thing.

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