



EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

THE PARISIANS

BOOK VIII

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THE PARISIANS

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

On the 8th of May the vote of the plebiscite was recorded,--between seven and eight millions of Frenchmen in support of the Imperial programme--in plain words, of the Emperor himself--against a minority of 1,500,000. But among the 1,500,000 were the old throne-shakers--those who compose and those who lead the mob of Paris. On the 14th, as Rameau was about to quit the editorial bureau of his printing-office, a note was brought in to him which strongly excited his nervous system. It contained a request to see him forthwith, signed by those two distinguished foreign members of the Secret Council of Ten, Thaddeus Loubinsky and Leonardo Raselli.

The meetings of that Council had been so long suspended that Rameau had almost forgotten its existence. He gave orders to admit the conspirators. The two men entered, the Pole, tall, stalwart, and with martial stride--the Italian, small, emaciated, with skulking, noiseless, cat-like step, both looking wondrous threadbare, and in that state called "shabby genteel," which belongs to the man who cannot work for his livelihood, and assumes a superiority over the man who can. Their outward appearance was in notable discord with that of the poet-politician--he all new in the last fashions of Parisian elegance, and redolent of Parisian prosperity and *_extrait de Mousseline_!*

"Confrere," said the Pole, seating himself on the edge of the table, while the Italian leaned against the mantelpiece, and glanced round the room with furtive eye, as if to detect its innermost secrets, or decide where safest to drop a Lucifer-match for its conflagration,--
"*_confrere_*," said the Pole, "your country needs you--"

"Rather the cause of all countries," interposed the Italian softly,--
"Humanity."

"Please to explain yourselves; but stay, wait a moment," said Rameau; and rising, he went to the door, opened it, looked forth, ascertained that the coast was clear, then reclosed the door as cautiously as a prudent man closes his pocket whenever shabby-genteel visitors appeal to him in the cause of his country, still more if they appeal in that of Humanity.

"Confrere," said the Pole, "this day a movement is to be made--a demonstration on behalf of your country--"

"Of Humanity," again softly interposed the Italian. "Attend and share it," said the Pole.

"Pardon me," said Rameau, "I do not know what you mean. I am now the editor of a journal in which the proprietor does not countenance violence; and if you come to me as a member of the Council, you must be aware that I should obey no orders but that of its president, whom I-- I have not seen for nearly a year; indeed I know not if the Council still exists."

"The Council exists, and with it the obligation it imposes," replied Thaddeus.

"Pampered with luxury," here the Pole raised his voice, "do you dare to reject the voice of Poverty and Freedom?"

"Hush, dear but too vehement confrere," murmured the bland Italian; "permit me to dispel the reasonable doubts of our _confrere_," and he took out of his breast-pocket a paper which he presented to Rameau; on it were written these words:

"This evening May 24th. Demonstration.--Faubourg du Temple.--Watch events, under orders of A. M. Bid the youngest member take that first opportunity to test nerves and discretion. He is not to act, but to observe."

No name was appended to this instruction, but a cipher intelligible to all members of the Council as significant of its president, Jean Lebeau.

"If I err not," said the Italian, "Citizen Rameau is our youngest confrere."

Rameau paused. The penalties for disobedience to an order of the President of the Council were too formidable to be disregarded. There

could be no doubt that,--though his name was not mentioned, he, Rameau, was accurately designated as the youngest member of the Council. Still, however he might have owed his present position to the recommendation of Lebeau, there was nothing in the conversation of M. de Mauleon which would warrant participation in a popular _emeute_ by the editor of a journal belonging to that mocker of the mob. Ah! but--and here again he glanced over the paper--he was asked "not to act; but to observe." To observe was the duty of a journalist. He might go to the demonstration as De Mauleon confessed he had gone to the Communist Club, a philosophical spectator.

"You do not disobey this order?" said the Pole, crossing his arms.

"I shall certainly go into the Faubourg du Temple this evening," answered Rameau, drily, "I have business that way."

"Bon!" said the Pole; "I did not think you would fail us, though you do edit a journal which says not a word on the duties that bind the French people to the resuscitation of Poland."

"And is not pronounced in decided accents upon the cause of the human race," put in the Italian, whispering.

"I do not write the political articles in *Le Seas Commun*," answered Rameau; "and I suppose that our president is satisfied with them since he recommended me to the preference of the person who does. Have you more to say? Pardon me, my time is precious, for it does not belong to me."

"Eno!" said the Italian, "we will detain you no longer." Here, with a bow and a smile, he glided towards the door.

"Confrere," muttered the Pole, lingering, "you must have become very rich!--do not forget the wrongs of Poland--I am their Representative--I --speaking in that character, not as myself individually--I have not breakfasted!"

Rameau, too thoroughly Parisian not to be as lavish of his own money as he was envious of another's, slipped some pieces of gold in the Pole's hand. The Pole's bosom heaved with manly emotion: "These pieces bear the effigies of the tyrant--I accept them as redeemed from disgrace by their uses to Freedom."

"Share them with Signor Raselli in the name of the same cause," whispered Rameau, with a smile he might have plagiarised from De Mauleon.

The Italian, whose ear was inured to whispers, heard and turned round as he stood at the threshold.

"No, confrere of France--no, confrere of Poland--I am Italian. All ways to take the life of an enemy are honourable--no way is honourable which begs money from a friend."

An hour or so later, Rameau was driven in his comfortable coupe to the Faubourg du Temple.

Suddenly, at the angle of a street, his coachman was stopped--a rough-looking man appeared at the door--_"Descends, mon petit bourgeois_" Behind the rough-looking man were menacing faces.

Rameau was not physically a coward--very few Frenchmen are, still fewer Parisians; and still fewer no matter what their birthplace, the men whom we call vain--the men who over-much covet distinction, and over-much dread reproach.

"Why should I descend at your summons?" said Rameau, haughtily. "Bah! Coachman, drive on!"

The rough-looking man opened the door, and silently extended a hand to Rameau, saying gently: "Take my advice, _mon bourgeois_. Get out--we want your carriage. It is a day of barricades--every little helps, even your coupe!"

While this man spoke others gesticulated; some shrieked out, "He is an employer! he thinks he can drive over the employed!"

Some leader of the crowd--a Parisian crowd always has a classical leader, who has never read the classics--thundered forth, "Tarquin's car! Down with Tarquin!" Therewith came a yell, "_A la lanterne_--Tarquin!"

We Anglo-Saxons, of the old country or the new, are not familiarised to the dread roar of a populace delighted to have a Roman authority for tearing us to pieces; still Americans know what is Lynch law. Rameau was in danger of Lynch law, when suddenly a face not unknown to him interposed between himself and the rough-looking man.

"Ha!" cried this new comer, "my young confrere, Gustave Rameau, welcome! Citizens, make way. I answer for this patriot--I, Armand Monnier. He comes to help use! Is this the way you receive him?" Then in a low

voice to Rameau, "Come out. Give your coupe to the barricade. What matters such rubbish? Trust to me--I expected you. Hist!--Lebeau bids me see that you are safe." Rameau then, seeking to drape himself in majesty,--as the aristocrats of journalism in a city wherein no other aristocracy is recognised naturally and commendably do, when ignorance combined with physical strength asserts itself to be a power, beside which the power of knowledge is what a learned poodle is to a tiger--Rameau then descended from his coupe, and said to this Titan of labour, as a French marquis might have said to his valet, and as, when the French marquis has become a ghost of the past, the man who keeps a coupe says to the man who mends its wheels, "Honest fellow, I trust you."

Monnier led the journalist through the mob to the rear of the barricade hastily constructed. Here were assembled very motley groups.

The majority were ragged boys, the *_gamins_* of Paris, commingled with several women of no reputable appearance, some dingily, some gaudily apparelled. The crowd did not appear as if the business in hand was a very serious one. Amidst the din of voices the sounds of laughter rose predominant, jests and *_bon mots_* flew from lip to lip. The astonishing good-humour of the Parisians was not yet excited into the ferocity that grows out of it by a street contest. It was less like a popular *_emeute_* than a gathering of schoolboys, bent not less on fun than on mischief. But, still, amid this gayer crowd were sinister, lowering faces; the fiercest were not those of the very poor, but rather of artisans, who, to judge by their dress, seemed well off of men belonging to yet higher grades. Rameau distinguished amongst these the *_medecin des pauvres_*, the philosophical atheist, sundry young, long-haired artists, middle aged writers for the Republican press, in close neighbourhood with ruffians of villainous aspect, who might have been newly returned from the galleys. None were regularly armed; still revolvers and muskets and long knives were by no means unfrequently interspersed among the rioters. The whole scene was to Rameau a confused panorama, and the dissonant tumult of yells and laughter, of menace and joke, began rapidly to act on his impressionable nerves. He felt that which is the prevalent character of a Parisian riot--the intoxication of an impulsive sympathy; coming there as a reluctant spectator, if action commenced he would have been borne readily into the thick of the action--he could not have helped it; already he grew impatient of the suspense of strife. Monnier having deposited him safely with his back to a wall, at the corner of a street handy for flight, if flight became expedient, had left him for several minutes, having business elsewhere. Suddenly the whisper of the Italian stole into his ear--"These men are fools. This is not the way to do business; this does not hurt the robber of Nice--Garibaldi's Nice: they

should have left it to me."

"What would you do?"

"I have invented a new machine," whispered the Friend of humanity; "it would remove all at one blow--lion and lioness, whelp and jackals--and then the Revolution if you will! not this paltry tumult. The cause of the human race is being frittered away. I am disgusted with Lebeau. Thrones are not overturned by gamins."

Before Rameau could answer, Monnier rejoined him. The artisan's face was overcast--his lips compressed, yet quivering with indignation.

"Brother," he said to Rameau, "to-day the cause is betrayed"--(the word trahi was just then coming into vogue at Paris)--"the blouses I counted on are recreant. I have just learned that all is quiet in the other quartiers where the rising was to have been simultaneous with this. We are in a guet-apens--the soldiers will be down on us in a few minutes; hark! don't you hear the distant tramp? Nothing for us but to die like men. Our blood will be avenged later. Here," and he thrust a revolver into Rameau's hand. Then with a lusty voice that rang through the crowd, he shouted "Vive le peuple!" The rioters caught and re-echoed the cry, mingled with other cries, "Vive la Republique!" "Vive le drapeau rouge!"

The shouts were yet at their full when a strong hand grasped Monnier's arm, and a clear, deep, but low voice thrilled through his ear: "Obey! I warned you. No fight to-day. Time not ripe. All that is needed is done--do not undo it. Hist! the sergens de ville are force enough to disperse the swarm of those gnats. Behind the sergens come soldiers who will not fraternise. Lose not one life to-day. The morrow when we shall need every man--nay, every gamin--will dawn soon. Answer not. Obey!" The same strong hand quitting its hold on Monnier, then seized Rameau by the wrist, and the same deep voice said, "Come with me." Rameau, turning in amaze, not unmixed with anger, saw beside him a tall man with sombrero hat pressed close over his head, and in the blouse of a labourer, but through such disguise he recognized the pale grey whiskers and green spectacles of Lebeau. He yielded passively to the grasp that led him away down the deserted street at the angle.

At the further end of that street, however, was heard the steady thud of hoofs.

"The soldiers are taking the mob at its rear," said Lebeau, calmly; "we have not a moment to lose--this way," and he plunged into a dismal court,

then into a labyrinth of lanes, followed mechanically by Rameau. They issued at last on the Boulevards, in which the usual loungers were quietly sauntering, wholly unconscious of the riot elsewhere. "Now, take that _fiacre_ and go home; write down your impressions of what you have seen, and take your MS. to M. de Mauleon." Lebeau here quitted him.

Meanwhile all happened as Lebeau had predicted. The _sergens de ville_ showed themselves in front of the barricades, a small troop of mounted soldiers appeared in the rear. The mob greeted the first with yells and a shower of stones; at the sight of the last they fled in all directions; and the _sergens de ville_, calmly scaling the barricades, carried off in triumph, as prisoners of war, 4 gamins, 3 women, and 1 Irishman loudly protesting innocence, and shrieking "Murther!" So ended the first inglorious rise against the plebiscite and the Empire, on the 14th of May, 1870.

From Isaura Cicogna to Madame de Grantmesnil.

Saturday. May 21.

"I am still, dearest Eulalie, under the excitement of impressions wholly new to me. I have this day witnessed one of those scenes which take us out of our private life, not into the world of fiction, but of history, in which we live as in the life of a nation. You know how intimate I have become with Valerie Duplessis. She is in herself so charming in her combination of petulant wilfulness and guileless _naivete_, that she might sit as a model for one of your exquisite heroines. Her father, who is in great favour at Court, had tickets for the _Salle des Etats_ of the Louvre today--when, as the journals will tell you, the results of the _plebiscite_ were formally announced to the Emperor--and I accompanied him and Valerie. I felt, on entering the hall, as if I had been living for months in an atmosphere of false rumours, for those I chiefly meet in the circles of artists and men of letters, and the wits and _flaneurs_ who haunt such circles, are nearly all hostile to the Emperor. They agree, at least, in asserting the decline of his popularity--the failure of his intellectual powers; in predicting his downfall--deriding the notion of a successor in his son. Well, I know not how to reconcile these statements with the spectacle I have beheld to-day.

"In the chorus of acclamation amidst which the Emperor entered the hall, it seemed as if one heard the voice of the France he had just appealed to. If the Fates are really weaving woe and shame in his woof, it is in hues which, to mortal eyes, seem brilliant with glory and joy.

"You will read the address of the President of the _Corps Legislatif_; I wonder how it will strike you! I own fairly that me it wholly carried away. At each sentiment I murmured to myself, 'Is not this true? and, if true, are France and human nature ungrateful?'

"'It is now,' said the President, 'eighteen years since France, wearied with confusion, and anxious for security, confiding in your genius and the Napoleonic dynasty, placed in your hands, together with the Imperial Crown, the authority which the public necessity demanded.' Then the address proceeded to enumerate the blessings that ensued--social order speedily restored--the welfare of all classes of society promoted--advances in commerce and manufactures to an extent hitherto unknown. Is not this true? and, if so, are you, noble daughter of France, ungrateful?'

"Then came words which touched me deeply--me, who, knowing nothing of politics, still feel the link that unites Art to Freedom: 'But from the first your Majesty has looked forward to the time when this concentration of power would no longer correspond to the aspirations of a tranquil and reassured country, and, foreseeing the progress of modern society, you proclaimed that 'Liberty must be the crowning of the edifice.'" Passing then over the previous gradual advances in popular government, the President came to the 'present self-abnegation, unprecedented in history,' and to the vindication of that plebiscite which I have heard so assailed--viz., Fidelity to the great principle upon which the throne was founded, required that so important a modification of a power bestowed by the people should not be made without the participation of the people themselves. Then, enumerating the millions who had welcomed the new form of government--the President paused a second or two, as if with suppressed emotion--and every one present held his breath, till, in a deeper voice, through which there ran a quiver that thrilled through the hall, he concluded with--'France is with you; France places the cause of liberty under the protection of your dynasty and the great bodies of the State.' Is France with him? I know not; but if the malcontents of France had been in the hall at that moment, I believe they would have felt the power of that wonderful sympathy which compels all the hearts in great audiences to beat in accord, and would have answered, 'It is true.'

"All eyes now fixed on the Emperor, and I noticed few eyes which were not moist with tears. You know that calm unrevealing face of his--a face which sometimes disappoints expectation. But there is that in it which I have seen in no other, but which I can imagine to have been common to the Romans of old, the dignity that arises from self-control--an expression which seems removed from the elation of joy, the depression of sorrow--

not unbecoming to one who has known great vicissitudes of Fortune, and is prepared alike for her frowns or her smiles.

"I had looked at that face while M. Schneider was reading the address-- it moved not a muscle, it might have been a face of marble. Even when at moments the words were drowned in applause and the Empress, striving at equal composure, still allowed us to see a movement of her eye lids, a tremble on her lips. The boy at his right, heir to his dynasty, had his looks fixed on the President, as if eagerly swallowing each word in the address, save once or twice, when he looked around the hall curiously, and with a smile as a mere child might look. He struck me as a mere child. Next to the Prince was one of those countenances which once seen are never to be forgotten--the true Napoleonic type, brooding, thoughtful, ominous, beautiful. But not with the serene energy that characterises the head of the first Napoleon when Emperor, and wholly without the restless eagerness for action which is stamped in the lean outline of Napoleon when First Consul: no--in Prince Napoleon there is a beauty to which, as woman, I could never give my heart--were I a man, the intellect that would not command my trust. But, nevertheless, in beauty, it is signal, and in that beauty the expression of intellect is predominant.

"Oh, dear Eulalie, how I am digressing! The Emperor spoke--and believe me, Eulalie, whatever the journals or your compatriots may insinuate, there is in that man no sign of declining intellect or failing health. I care not what may be his years, but that man is in mind and in health as young as Caesar when he crossed the Rubicon.

"The old cling to the past--they do not go forward to the future. There was no going back in that speech of the Emperor. There was something grand and something young in the modesty with which he put aside all references to that which his Empire had done in the past, and said with a simple earnestness of manner which I cannot adequately describe--

"We must more than ever look fearlessly forward to the future. Who can be opposed to the progressive march of a regime founded by a great people in the midst of political disturbance, and which now is fortified by liberty?"

"As he closed, the walls of that vast hall seemed to rock with an applause that must have been heard on the other side of the Seine.

"Vive l'Empereur!" "Vive l'Imperatrice!" "Vive le Prince Imperial!"--and the last cry was yet more prolonged than the others,

as if to affirm the dynasty.

"Certainly I can imagine no Court in the old days of chivalry more splendid than the audience in that grand hall of the Louvre. To the right of the throne all the ambassadors of the civilised world in the blaze of their rich costumes and manifold orders. In the gallery at the left, yet more behind, the dresses and jewels of the dames d'honneur and of the great officers of State. And when the Empress rose to depart, certainly my fancy cannot picture a more queenlike image, or one that seemed more in unison with the representation of royal pomp and power. The very dress, of colour which would have been fatal to the beauty of most women equally fair--a deep golden colour--(Valerie profanely called it buff)--seemed so to suit the splendour of the ceremony and the day; it seemed as if that stately form stood in the midst of a sunlight reflected from itself. Day seemed darkened when that sunlight passed away.

"I fear you will think I have suddenly grown servile to the gauds and shows of mere royalty. I ask myself if that be so--I think not. Surely it is a higher sense of greatness which has been impressed on me by the pageant of to-day I feel as if there were brought vividly before me the majesty of France, through the representation of the ruler she has crowned.

"I feel also as if there, in that hall, I found a refuge from all the warring contests in which no two seem to me in agreement as to the sort of government to be established in place of the present. The 'Liberty' clamoured for by one would cut the throat of the 'Liberty' worshipped by another.

"I see a thousand phantom forms of LIBERTY--but only one living symbol of ORDER--that which spoke from a throne to-day."

Isaura left her letter uncompleted. On the following Monday she was present at a crowded soiree given by M. Louvier. Among the guests were some of the most eminent leaders of the Opposition, including that vivacious master of sharp sayings, M. P-----, whom Savarin entitled "the French Sheridan;" if laws could be framed in epigrams he would be also the French Solon.

There, too, was Victor de Mauleon, regarded by the Republican party with equal admiration and distrust. For the distrust, he himself pleasantly accounted in talk with Savarin.

"How can I expect to be trusted? I represent 'Common Sense;' every Parisian likes Common Sense in print, and cries '_Je suis trahi_' when Common Sense is to be put into action."

A group of admiring listeners had collected round one (perhaps the most brilliant) of those oratorical lawyers by whom, in France, the respect for all laws has been so often talked away: he was speaking of the Saturday's ceremonial with eloquent indignation. It was a mockery to France to talk of her placing Liberty under the protection of the Empire.

There was a flagrant token of the military force under which civil freedom was held in the very dress of the Emperor and his insignificant son: the first in the uniform of a General of Division; the second, forsooth, in that of a _sous-lieutenant_. The other liberal chiefs chimed in: "The army," said one, "was an absurd expense; it must be put down:" "The world was grown too civilised for war," said another: "The Empress was priest-ridden," said a third: "Churches might be tolerated; Voltaire built a church, but a church simply to the God of Nature, not of priestcraft,"--and so on.

Isaura, whom any sneer at religion pained and revolted, here turned away from the orators to whom she had before been listening with earnest attention, and her eyes fell on the countenance of De Mauleon, who was seated opposite.

The countenance startled her, its expression was so angrily scornful; that expression, however, vanished at once as De Mauleon's eyes met her own, and drawing his chair near to her, he said, smiling: "Your look tells me that I almost frightened you by the ill-bred frankness with which my face must have betrayed my anger, at hearing such imbecile twaddle from men who aspire to govern our turbulent France. You remember that after Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake a quack advertised 'pills against earthquakes.' These _messieurs_ are not so cunning as the quack; he did not name the ingredients of his pills."

"But, M. de Mauleon," said Isaura, "if you, being opposed to the Empire, think so ill of the wisdom of those who would destroy it, are you prepared with remedies for earthquakes more efficacious than their pills?"

"I reply as a famous English statesman, when in opposition, replied to a somewhat similar question,--'I don't prescribe till I'm called in.'"

"To judge by the seven millions and a half whose votes were announced on

Saturday, and by the enthusiasm with which the Emperor was greeted, there is too little fear of an earthquake for a good trade of the pills of these _messieurs_, or for fair play to the remedies you will not disclose till called in."

"Ah, Mademoiselle! playful wit from lips not formed for politics makes me forget all about emperors and earthquakes. Pardon that commonplace compliment--remember I am a Frenchman, and cannot help being frivolous."

"You rebuke my presumption too gently. True, I ought not to intrude political subjects on one like you--I understand so little about them--but this is my excuse, I do so desire to know more."

M. de Mauleon paused, and looked at her earnestly with a kindly, half-compassionate look, wholly free from the impertinence of gallantry. "Young poetess," he said, softly, "you care for politics. Happy, indeed, is he--and whether he succeed or fail in his ambition abroad, proud should he be of an ambition crowned at home--he who has made you desire to know more of politics!"

The girl felt the blood surge to her temples. How could she have been so self-confessed? She made no reply, nor did M. de Mauleon seem to expect one; with that rare delicacy of high breeding which appears in France to belong to a former generation, he changed his tone, and went on as if there had been no interruption to the question her words implied.

"You think the Empire secure--that it is menaced by an earthquake? You deceive yourself. The Emperor began with a fatal mistake, but a mistake it needs many years to discover. He disdained the slow natural process of adjustment between demand and supply--employer and workmen. He desired--no ignoble ambition--to make Paris the wonder of the world, the eternal monument of his reign. In so doing, he sought to create artificial modes of content for revolutionary workmen. Never has any ruler had such tender heed of manual labour to the disparagement of intellectual culture. Paris is embellished; Paris is the wonder of the world; other great towns have followed its example; they, too, have their rows of palaces and temples. Well, the time comes when the magician can no longer give work to the spirits he raises; then they must fall on him and rend: out of the very houses he built for the better habitation of workmen will flock the malcontents who cry, 'Down with the Empire!' On the 21st of May you witnessed the pompous ceremony which announces to the Empire a vast majority of votes, that will be utterly useless to it except as food for gunpowder in the times that are at hand. Seven days before, on the 14th of May, there was a riot in the Faubourg d'Temple--

easily put down--you scarcely hear of it. That riot was not the less necessary to those who would warn the Empire that it is mortal. True, the riot disperses--but it is unpunished; riot unpunished is a revolution begun. The earthquake is nearer than you think; and for that earthquake what are the pills you quacks advertise? They prate of an age too enlightened for war; they would mutilate the army--nay, disband it if they could--with Prussia next door to France. Prussia, desiring, not unreasonably, to take that place in the world which France now holds, will never challenge France; if she did, she would be too much in the wrong to find a second: Prussia knowing that she has to do with the vainest, the most conceited, the rashest antagonist that ever flourished a rapier in the face of a _spadassin_--Prussia will make France challenge her.

"And how do _ces messieurs_ deal with the French army? Do they dare to say to the ministers, 'Reform it'? Do they dare say, 'Prefer for men whose first duty it is to obey, discipline to equality--insist on the distinction between the officer and the private, and never confound it; Prussian officers are well-educated gentlemen, see that yours are'? Oh no; they are democrats too stanch not to fraternise with an armed mob; they content themselves with grudging an extra sou to the Commissariat, and winking at the millions fraudulently pocketed by some 'Liberal contractor.' _Dieu des dieux_! France to be beaten, not as at Waterloo by hosts combined, but in fair duel by a single foe! Oh, the shame! the shame! But as the French army is now organised, beaten she must be, if she meets the march of the German."

"You appal me with your sinister predictions," said Isaura; "but, happily, there is no sign of war. M. Duplessis, who is in the confidence of the Emperor, told us only the other day that Napoleon, on learning the result of the plebiscite, said: 'The foreign journalists who have been insisting that the Empire cannot coexist with free institutions, will no longer hint that it can be safely assailed from without.' And more than ever I may say _L'Empire c'est la paix_!"

Monsieur de Mauleon shrugged his shoulders. "The old story--Troy and the wooden horse."

"Tell me, M. de Mauleon, why do you, who so despise the Opposition, join with it in opposing the Empire?"

"Mademoiselle, the Empire opposes me; while it lasts I cannot be even a _Depute_; when it is gone, Heaven knows that I may be, perhaps Dictator; one thing, you may rely upon, that I would, if not Dictator myself,

support any man who was better fitted for that task."

"Better fitted to destroy the liberty which he pretended to fight for."

"Not exactly so," replied M. de Mauleon, imperturbably--"better fitted to establish a good government in lieu of the bad one he had fought against, and the much worse governments that would seek to turn France into a madhouse, and make the maddest of the inmates the mad doctor!" He turned away, and here their conversation ended.

But it so impressed Isaura, that the same night she concluded her letter to Madame de Grantmesnil, by giving a sketch of its substance, prefaced by an ingenuous confession that she felt less sanguine confidence in the importance of the applauses which had greeted the Emperor at the Saturday's ceremonial, and ending thus: "I can but confusedly transcribe the words of this singular man, and can give you no notion of the manner and the voice which made them eloquent. Tell me, can there be any truth in his gloomy predictions? I try not to think so, but they seem to rest over that brilliant hall of the Louvre like an ominous thunder-cloud."

CHAPTER II.

The Marquis de Rochebriant was seated in his pleasant apartment, glancing carelessly at the envelopes of many notes and letters lying yet unopened on his breakfast-table. He had risen late at noon, for he had not gone to bed till dawn. The night had been spent at his club--over the card-table--by no means to the pecuniary advantage of the Marquis. The reader will have learned, through the conversation recorded in a former chapter between De Mauleon and Enguerrand de Vandemar, that the austere Seigneur Breton had become a fast *viveur* of Paris. He had long since spent the remnant of Louvier's premium of L10,000., and he owed a year's interest. For this last there was an excuse. M. Collot, the contractor to whom he had been advised to sell the yearly fall of his forest-trees, had removed the trees, but had never paid a sou beyond the preliminary deposit; so that the revenue, out of which the mortgagee should be paid his interest, was not forthcoming. Alain had instructed M. Hebert to press the contractor; the contractor had replied, that if not pressed he could soon settle all claims--if pressed, he must declare himself bankrupt. The Chevalier de Finisterre had laughed at the alarm which Alain conceived when he first found himself in the condition of debtor for a sum he could not pay--creditor for a sum he could not recover.

"Bagatelle!" said the Chevalier. "Tschu! Collot, if you give him time, is as safe as the Bank of France, and Louvier knows it. Louvier will not trouble you--Louvier, the best fellow in the world! I'll call on him and explain matters."

It is to be presumed that the Chevalier did so explain; for though both at the first, and quite recently at the second default of payment, Alain received letters from M. Louvier's professional agent, as reminders of interest due, and as requests for its payment, the Chevalier assured him that these applications were formalities of convention--that Louvier, in fact, knew nothing about them; and when dining with the great financier himself, and cordially welcomed and called "Mon cher," Alain had taken him aside and commenced explanation and excuse, Louvier had cut him short. "Peste! don't mention such trifles. There is such a thing as business--that concerns my agent; such a thing as friendship--that concerns me. Allez!"

Thus M. de Rochebriant, confiding in debtor and in creditor, had suffered twelve months to glide by without much heed of either, and more than live up to an income amply sufficient indeed for the wants of an ordinary bachelor, but needing more careful thrift than could well be expected from the head of one of the most illustrious houses in France, cast so young into the vortex of the most expensive capital in the world.

The poor Marquis glided into the grooves that slant downward, much as the French Marquis of tradition was wont to glide; not that he appeared to live extravagantly, but he needed all he had for his pocket-money, and had lost that dread of being in debt which he had brought up from the purer atmosphere of Bretagne.

But there were some debts which; of course, a Rochebriant must pay--debts of honour--and Alain had, on the previous night, incurred such a debt and must pay it that day. He had been strongly tempted, when the debt rose to the figure it had attained, to risk a change of luck; but whatever his imprudence, he was incapable of dishonesty. If the luck did not change, and he lost more, he would be without means to meet his obligations. As the debt now stood, he calculated that he could just discharge it by the sale of his coupe and horses. It is no wonder he left his letters unopened, however charming they might be; he was quite sure they would contain no cheque which would enable him to pay his debt and retain his equipage.

The door opened, and the valet announced M. le Chevalier de Finisterre--

a man with smooth countenance and air *_distingue_*, a pleasant voice and perpetual smile.

"Well, mon cher," cried the Chevalier, "I hope that you recovered the favour of Fortune before you quitted her green table last night. When I left she seemed very cross with you."

"And so continued to the end," answered Alain, with well-simulated gaiety--much too *_bon gentilhomme_* to betray rage or anguish for pecuniary loss.

"After all," said de Finisterre, lighting his cigarette, "the uncertain goddess could not do you much harm; the stakes were small, and your adversary, the Prince, never goes double or quits."

"Nor I either. 'Small,' however, is a word of relative import; the stakes might be small to you, to me large. *_Entre nous, cher ami_*, I am at the end of my purse, and I have only this consolation--I am cured of play: not that I leave the complaint, the complaint leaves me; it can no more feed on me than a fever can feed on a skeleton."

"Are you serious?"

"As serious as a mourner who has just buried his all."

"His all? Tut, with such an estate as Rochebriant!"

For the first time in that talk Alain's countenance became overcast.

"And how long will Rochebriant be mine? You know that I hold it at the mercy of the mortgagee, whose interest has not been paid, and who could if, he so pleased, issue notice, take proceedings--that--"

"Peste!" interrupted de Finisterre; "Louvier take proceedings! Louvier, the best fellow in the world! But don't I see his handwriting on that envelope? No doubt an invitation to dinner."

Alain took up the letter thus singled forth from a miscellany of epistles, some in female handwritings, unsealed but ingeniously twisted into Gordian knots--some also in female handwritings, carefully sealed--others in ill-looking envelopes, addressed in bold, legible, clerk-like caligraphy. Taken altogether, these epistles had a character in common; they betokened the correspondence of a *_viveur_*, regarded from the female side as young, handsome, well-born--on the male side, as a *_viveur_* who

had forgotten to pay his hosier and tailor.

Louvier wrote a small, not very intelligible, but very masculine hand, as most men who think cautiously and act promptly do write. The letter ran thus:

"_Cher petit Marquis_" (at that commencement Alain haughtily raised his head and bit his lips).

"_CHER PETIT MARQUIS_,--It is an age since I have seen you. No doubt my humble soirees are too dull for a _beau seigneur_ so courted. I forgive you. Would I were a beau seigneur at your age! Alas! I am only a commonplace man of business, growing old, too. Aloft from the world in which I dwell, you can scarcely be aware that I have embarked a great part of my capital in building speculations. There is a Rue de Louvier that runs its drains right through my purse. I am obliged to call in the moneys due to me. My agent informs me that I am just 7000 louis short of the total I need--all other debts being paid in--and that there is a trifle more than 7000 louis owned to me as interest on my hypotheque on Rochebriant: kindly pay into his hands before the end of this week that sum. You have been too lenient to Collot, who must owe you more than that. Send agent to him. _Desole_ to trouble you, and am au _desespoir_ to think that my own pressing necessities compel me to urge you to take so much trouble. _Mais que faire_? The Rue de Louvier stops the way, and I must leave it to my agent to clear it.

"Accept all my excuses, with the assurance of my sentiments the most cordial. PAUL LOUVIER."

Alain tossed the letter to De Finisterre. "Read that from the best fellow in the world."

The Chevalier laid down his cigarette and read. "_Diable_!" he said, when he returned the letter and resumed the cigarette--"_Diable_! Louvier must be much pressed for money, or he would not have written in this strain. What does it matter? Collot owes you more than 7000 louis. Let your lawyer get them, and go to sleep with both ears on your pillow."

"Ah! you think Collot can pay if he will?"

"_Ah! foi_! did not M. Gandrin tell you that M. Collot was safe to buy your wood at more money than any one else would give?"

"Certainly," said Alain, comforted. "Gandrin left that impression on my mind. I will set him on the man. All will come right, I dare say; but if it does not come right, what would Louvier do?"

"Louvier do!" answered Finisterre, reflectively. "Well do you ask my opinion and advice?"

"Earnestly, I ask."

"Honestly, then, I answer. I am a little on the Bourse myself--most Parisians are. Louvier has made a gigantic speculation in this new street, and with so many other irons in the fire he must want all the money he can get at. I dare say that if you do not pay him what you owe, he must leave it to his agent to take steps for announcing the sale of Rochebriant. But he detests scandal; he hates the notion of being severe; rather than that, in spite of his difficulties, he will buy Rochebriant of you at a better price than it can command at public sale. Sell it to him. Appeal to him to act generously, and you will flatter him. You will get more than the old place is worth. Invest the surplus--live as you have done, or better--and marry an heiress. Morbleu! a Marquis de Rochebriant, if he were sixty years old, would rank high in the matrimonial market. The more the democrats have sought to impoverish titles and laugh down historical names, the more do rich democrat fathers-in-law seek to decorate their daughters with titles and give their grandchildren the heritage of historical names. You look shocked, _pauvre anti_. Let us hope, then, that Collot will pay. Set your dog--I mean your lawyer--at him; seize him by the throat!"

Before Alain had recovered from the stately silence with which he had heard this very practical counsel, the valet again appeared, and ushered in M. Frederic Lemerrier.

There was no cordial acquaintance between the visitors. Lemerrier was chafed at finding himself supplanted in Alain's intimate companionship by so new a friend, and De Finisterre affected to regard Lemerrier as a would-be exquisite of low birth and bad taste.

Alain, too, was a little discomposed at the sight of Lemerrier, remembering the wise cautions which that old college friend had wasted on him at the commencement of his Parisian career, and smitten with vain remorse that the cautions had been so arrogantly slighted.

It was with some timidity that he extended his hand to Frederic, and he

was surprised as well as moved by the more than usual warmth with which it was grasped by the friend he had long neglected. Such affectionate greeting was scarcely in keeping with the pride which characterised Frederic Lemerrier.

"Ma foi!" said the Chevalier, glancing towards the clock, "how time flies! I had no idea it was so late. I must leave you now, my dear Rochebriant. Perhaps we shall meet at the club later--I dine there to-day. Au plaisir, M. Lemerrier."

CHAPTER III.

When the door had closed on the Chevalier, Frederic's countenance became very grave. Drawing his chair near to Alain, he said: "We have not seen much of each other lately,--nay, no excuses; I am well aware that it could scarcely be otherwise. Paris has grown so large and so subdivided into sets, that the best friends belonging to different sets become as divided as if the Atlantic flowed between them. I come to-day in consequence of something I have just heard from Duplessis. Tell me, have you got the money for the wood you sold to M. Collot a year ago?"

"No," said Alain, falteringly.

"Good heavens! none of it?"

"Only the deposit of ten per cent., which of course I spent, for it formed the greater part of my income. What of Collot? Is he really unsafe?"

"He is ruined, and has fled the country. His flight was the talk of the Bourse this morning. Duplessis told me of it."

Alain's face paled. "How is Louvier to be paid? Read that letter!"

Lemerrier rapidly scanned his eye over the contents of Louvier's letter.

"It is true, then, that you owe this man a year's interest--more than 7,000 louis?"

"Somewhat more--yes. But that is not the first care that troubles me--Rochebriant may be lost, but with it not my honour. I owe the Russian

Prince 300 louis, lost to him last night at _ecarte_. I must find a purchaser for my coupe and horses; they cost me 600 louis last year,--do you know any one who will give me three?"

"Pooh! I will give you six; your _alezan_ alone is worth half the money!"

"My dear Frederic, I will not sell them to you on any account. But you have so many friends--"

"Who would give their soul to say, 'I bought these horses of Rochebriant.' Of course I do. Ha! young Rameau, you are acquainted with him?"

"Rameau! I never heard of him!"

"Vanity of vanities, then what is fame? Rameau is the editor of Le Sens Commun. You read that journal?"

"Yes, it has clever articles, and I remember how I was absorbed in the eloquent _romance_ which appeared in it."

"Ah! by the Signora Cicogna, with whom I think you were somewhat smitten last year."

"Last year--was I? How a year can alter a man! But my debt to the Prince. What has Le Sens Commun to do with my horses?"

"I met Rameau at Savarin's the other evening. He was making himself out a hero and a martyr! his coupe had been taken from him to assist in a barricade in that senseless _emeute_ ten days ago; the _coupe_ got smashed, the horses disappeared. He will buy one of your horses and _coupe_."

"Leave it to me! I know where to dispose of the other two horses. At what hour do you want the money?"

"Before I go to dinner at the club."

"You shall have it within two hours; but you must not dine at the club to-day. I have a note from Duplessis to invite you to dine with him to-day!"

"Duplessis! I know so little of him!"

"You should know him better. He is the only man who can give you sound advice as to this difficulty with Louvier; and he will give it the more carefully and zealously because he has that enmity to Louvier which one rival financier has to another. I dine with him too. We shall find an occasion to consult him quietly; he speaks of you most kindly. What a lovely girl his daughter is!"

"I dare say. Ah! I wish I had been less absurdly fastidious. I wish I had entered the army as a private soldier six months ago; I should have been a corporal by this time! Still it is not too late. When Rochebriant is gone, I can yet say with the *_Mousquetaire_* in the melodrama: 'I am rich--I have my honour and my sword!'"

"Nonsense! Rochebriant shall be saved; meanwhile I hasten to Rameau. *_Au revoir_*, at the Hotel Duplessis--seven o'clock."

Lemercier went, and in less than two hours sent the Marquis bank-notes for 600 louis, requesting an order for the delivery of the horses and carriage.

That order written and signed, Alain hastened to acquit himself of his debt of honour, and contemplating his probable ruin with a lighter heart presented himself at the Hotel Duplessis.

Duplessis made no pretensions to vie with the magnificent existence of Louvier. His house, though agreeably situated and flatteringly styled the Hotel Duplessis, was of moderate size, very unostentatiously furnished; nor was it accustomed to receive the brilliant motley crowds which assembled in the salons of the elder financier.

Before that year, indeed, Duplessis had confined such entertainments as he gave to quiet men of business, or a few of the more devoted and loyal partisans of the Imperial dynasty; but since Valerie came to live with him he had extended his hospitalities to wider and livelier circles, including some celebrities in the world of art and letters as well as of fashion. Of the party assembled that evening at dinner were Isaura, with the Signora Venosta, one of the Imperial Ministers, the Colonel whom Alain had already met at Lemercier's supper, *_Deputes_* (ardent Imperialists), and the Duchesse de Tarascon; these, with Alain and Frederic, made up the party. The conversation was not particularly gay. Duplessis himself, though an exceedingly well-read and able man, had not the genial accomplishments of a brilliant host. Constitutionally grave and habitually taciturn--though there were moments in which he was roused

out of his wonted self into eloquence or wit--he seemed to-day absorbed in some engrossing train of thought. The Minister, the _Deputes_ and the Duchesse de Tarascon talked politics, and ridiculed the trumpety _emeute_ of the 14th; exulted in the success of the plebiscite; and admitting, with indignation, the growing strength of Prussia, and--with scarcely less indignation, but more contempt, censuring the selfish egotism of England in disregarding the due equilibrium of the European balance of power,--hinted at the necessity of annexing Belgium as a set-off against the results of Sadowa.

Alain found himself seated next to Isaura--to the woman who had so captivated his eye and fancy on his first arrival in Paris.

Remembering his last conversation with Graham nearly a year ago, he felt some curiosity to ascertain whether the rich Englishman had proposed to her, and if so, been refused or accepted.

The first words that passed between them were trite enough, but after a little pause in the talk, Alain said:

"I think Mademoiselle and myself have an acquaintance in common-Monsieur Vane, a distinguished Englishman. Do you know if he be in Paris at present? I have not seen him for many months."

"I believe he is in London; at least, Colonel Morley met the other day a friend of his who said so."

Though Isaura strove to speak in a tone of indifference, Alain's ear detected a ring of pain in her voice; and watching her countenance, he was impressed with a saddened change in its expression. He was touched, and his curiosity was mingled with a gentler interest as he said "When I last saw M. Vane I should have judged him to be too much under the spell of an enchantress to remain long without the pale of the circle she draws around her."

Isaura turned her face quickly towards the speaker, and her lips moved, but she said nothing audibly.

"Can there have been quarrel or misunderstanding?" thought Alain; and after that question his heart asked itself, "Supposing Isaura were free, her affections disengaged, could he wish to woo and to win her?" and his heart answered--"Eighteen months ago thou wert nearer to her than now. Thou wert removed from her for ever when thou didst accept the world as a barrier between you; then, poor as thou wert, thou wouldst have preferred

her to riches. Thou went then sensible only of the ingenuous impulses of youth, but the moment thou saidst, 'I am Rochebriaut, and having once owned the claims of birth and station, I cannot renounce them for love, Isaura became but a dream. Now that ruin stares thee in the face--now that thou must grapple with the sternest difficulties of adverse fate--thou hast lost the poetry of sentiment which could alone give to that dream the colours and the form of human life." He could not again think of that fair creature as a prize that he might even dare to covet. And as he met her inquiring eyes, and saw her quivering lip, he felt instinctively that Graham was dear to her, and that the tender interest with which she inspired himself was untroubled by one pang of jealousy. He resumed:

"Yes, the last time I saw the Englishman he spoke with such respectful homage of one lady, whose hand he would deem it the highest reward of ambition to secure, that I cannot but feel deep compassion for him if that ambition has been foiled; and thus only do I account for his absence from Paris."

"You are an intimate friend of Mr. Vane's?"

"No, indeed, I have not that honour; our acquaintance is but slight, but it impressed me with the idea of a man of vigorous intellect, frank temper, and perfect honour."

Isaura's face brightened with the joy we feel when we hear the praise of those we love.

At this moment, Duplessis, who had been observing the Italian and the young Marquis, for the first time during dinner, broke silence.

"Mademoiselle," he said, addressing Isaura across the table, "I hope I have not been correctly informed that your literary triumph has induced you to forego the career in which all the best judges concur that your successes would be not less brilliant; surely one art does not exclude another."

Elated by Alain's report of Graham's words, by the conviction that these words applied to herself, and by the thought that her renunciation of the stage removed a barrier between them, Isaura answered, with a sort of enthusiasm:

"I know not, M. Duplessis, if one art excludes another; if there be desire to excel in each. But I have long lost all desire to excel in the

art you refer to, and resigned all idea of the career in which it opens."

"So M. Vane told me," said Alain, in a whisper.

"When?"

"Last year--on the day that he spoke in terms of admiration so merited of the lady whom M. Duplessis has just had the honour to address."

All this while, Valerie, who was seated at the further end of the table beside the Minister, who had taken her in to dinner, had been watching, with eyes, the anxious tearful sorrow of which none but her father had noticed, the low-voiced confidence between Alain and the friend, whom till that day she had so enthusiastically loved. Hitherto she had been answering in monosyllables all attempts of the great man to draw her into conversation; but now, observing how Isaura blushed and looked down, that strange faculty in women, which we men call dissimulation, and which in them is truthfulness to their own nature, enabled her to carry off the sharpest anguish she had ever experienced, by a sudden burst of levity of spirit. She caught up some commonplace the Minister had adapted to what he considered the poverty of her understanding, with a quickness of satire which startled that grave man, and he gazed at her astonished. Up to that moment he had secretly admired her as a girl well brought up--as girls fresh from a French convent are supposed to be; now, hearing her brilliant rejoinder to his stupid observation, he said inly: "Dame! the low birth of a financier's daughter shows itself."

But, being a clever man himself, her retort put him on his mettle, and he became, to his own amazement, brilliant himself. With that matchless quickness which belongs to Parisians, the guests around him seized the new esprit de conversation which had been evoked between the statesman and the childlike girl beside him; and as they caught up the ball, lightly flung among them, they thought within themselves how much more sparkling the financier's pretty, lively daughter was than that dark-eyed young muse, of whom all the journalists of Paris were writing in a chorus of welcome and applause, and who seemed not to have a word to say worth listening to, except to the handsome young Marquis, whom, no doubt, she wished to fascinate.

Valerie fairly outshone Isaura in intellect and in wit; and neither Valerie nor Isaura cared, to the value of a bean-straw, about that distinction. Each was thinking only of the prize which the humblest peasant women have in common with the most brilliantly accomplished of their sex--the heart of a man beloved.

CHAPTER IV.

On the Continent generally, as we all know, men do not sit drinking wine together after the ladies retire. So when the signal was given all the guests adjourned to the salon; and Alain quitted Isaura to gain the ear of the Duchesse de Tarascon.

"It is long--at, least long for Paris life," said the Marquis--"since my first visit to you, in company with Enguerrand de Vandemar. Much that you then said rested on my mind, disturbing the prejudices I took from Bretagne."

"I am proud to hear it, my kinsman."

"You know that I would have taken military service under the Emperor, but for the regulation which would have compelled me to enter the ranks as a private soldier."

"I sympathise with that scruple; but you are aware that the Emperor himself could not have ventured to make any exception even in your favour."

"Certainly not. I repent me of my pride; perhaps I may enlist still in some regiment sent to Algiers."

"No; there are other ways in which a Rochebriant can serve a throne. There will be an office at Court vacant soon, which would not misbecome your birth."

"Pardon me; a soldier serves his country--a courtier owns a master; and I cannot take the livery of the Emperor, though I could wear the uniform of France."

"Your distinction is childish, my kinsman," said the Duchesse, impetuously. "You talk as if the Emperor had an interest apart from the nation. I tell you that he has not a corner of his heart--not even one reserved for his son and his dynasty--in which the thought of France does not predominate."

"I do not presume, Madame la Duchesse, to question the truth of what you

say; but I have no reason to suppose that the same thought does not predominate in the heart of the Bourbon. The Bourbon would be the first to say to me: 'If France needs your sword against her foes, let it not rest in the scabbard.' But would the Bourbon say, 'The place of a Rochebriant is among the _valetaille_ of the Corsican's successor'?"

"Alas for poor France!" said the Duchesse; "and alas for men like you, my proud cousin, if the Corsican's successors or successor be--"

"Henry V." interrupted Alain, with a brightening eye. "Dreamer! No; some descendant of the mob-kings who gave Bourbons and nobles to the guillotine."

While the Duchesse and Alain were thus conversing, Isaura had seated herself by Valerie, and, unconscious of the offence she had given, addressed her in those pretty caressing terms with which young-lady friends are wont to compliment each other; but Valerie answered curtly or sarcastically, and turned aside to converse with the Minister. A few minutes more, and the party began to break up. Lemer cier, however, detained Alain, whispering, "Duplessis will see us on your business so soon as the other guests have gone."

CHAPTER V.

"Monsieur le Marquis," said Duplessis, when the salon was cleared of all but himself and the two friends, "Lemer cier has confided to me the state of your affairs in connection with M. Louvier, and flatters me by thinking my advice may be of some service; if so, command me."

"I shall most gratefully accept your advice," answered Alain, "but I fear my condition defies even your ability and skill."

"Permit me to hope not, and to ask a few necessary questions. M. Louvier has constituted himself your sole mortgagee; to what amount, at what interest, and from what annual proceeds is the interest paid?"

Herewith Alain gave details already furnished to the reader. Duplessis listened, and noted down the replies.

"I see it all," he said, when Alain had finished. "M. Louvier had predetermined to possess himself of your estate: he makes himself

mortgagee at a rate of interest so low, that I tell you fairly, at the present value of money, I doubt if you could find any capitalist who would accept the transfer of the mortgage at the same rate. This is not like Louvier, unless he had an object to gain, and that object is your land. The revenue from your estate is derived chiefly from wood, out of which the interest due to Louvier is to be paid. M. Gandrin, in a skilfully-guarded letter, encourages you to sell the wood from your forests to a man who offers you several thousand francs more than it could command from customary buyers. I say nothing against M. Gandrin, but every man who knows Paris as I do, knows that M. Louvier can put, and has put, a great deal of money into M. Gandrin's pocket. The purchaser of your wood does not pay more than his deposit, and has just left the country insolvent. Your purchaser, M. Collot, was an adventurous speculator; he would have bought anything at any price, provided he had time to pay; if his speculations had been lucky he would have paid. M. Louvier knew, as I knew, that M. Collot was a gambler, and the chances were that he would not pay. M. Louvier allows a year's interest on his hypothec to become due-notice thereof duly given to you by his agent--now you come under the operation of the law. Of course, you know what the law is?"

"Not exactly," answered Alain, feeling frostbitten by the congealing words of his counsellor; "but I take it for granted that if I cannot pay the interest of a sum borrowed on my property, that property itself is forfeited."

"No, not quite that--the law is mild. If the interest which should be paid half-yearly remains unpaid at the end of a year, the mortgagee has a right to be impatient, has he not?"

"Certainly he has."

"Well, then, *_on fait un commandement tendant de saisie immobiliere_*, viz: The mortgagee gives a notice that the property shall be put up for sale. Then it is put up for sale, and in most cases the mortgagee buys it in. Here, certainly, no competitors in the mere business way would vie with Louvier; the mortgage at three and a half per cent. covers more than the estate is apparently worth. Ah! but stop, M. le Marquis; the notice is not yet served: the whole process would take six months from the day it is served to the taking possession after the sale; in the meanwhile, if you pay the interest due, the action drops. Courage, M. le Marquis! Hope yet, if you condescend to call me friend."

"And me," cried Lemercier; "I will sell out of my railway shares to-

morrow-see to it, Duplessis--enough to pay off the damnable interest.
See to it, _mon ami_."

"Agree to that, M. le Marquis, and you are safe for another year," said Duplessis, folding up the paper on which he had made his notes, but fixing on Alain quiet eyes half concealed under drooping lids.

"Agree to that!" cried Rochebriant, rising--"agree to allow even my worst enemy to pay for me moneys I could never hope to repay--agree to allow the oldest and most confiding friends to do so--M. Duplessis, never! If I carried the porter's knot of an Auverguat, I should still remain gentilhomme and Breton."

Duplessis, habitually the driest of men, rose with a moistened eye and flushing cheek--"Monsieur le Marquis, vouchsafe me the honour to shake hands with you. I, too, am by descent gentilhomme, by profession a speculator on the Bourse. In both capacities I approve the sentiment you have uttered. Certainly, if our friend Frederic lent you 7000 Louis or so this year, it would be impossible for you even to foresee the year in which you could repay it; but,"--here Duplessis paused a minute, and then lowering the tone of his voice, which had been somewhat vehement and enthusiastic, into that of a colloquial good-fellowship, equally rare to the measured reserve of the financier, he asked, with a lively twinkle of his grey eye, "Did you never hear, Marquis, of a little encounter between me and M. Louvier?"

"Encounter at arms--does Louvier fight?" asked Alain, innocently.

"In his own way he is always fighting; but I speak metaphorically. You see this small house of mine--so pinched in by the houses next to it that I can neither get space for a ball-room for Valerie, nor a dining-room for more than a friendly party like that which has honoured me to-day. _Eh bien_! I bought this house a few years ago, meaning to buy the one next to it and throw the two into one. I went to the proprietor of the next house, who, as I knew, wished to sell. 'Aha,' he thought, 'this is the rich Monsieur Duplessis;' and he asked me 2000 louis more than the house was worth. We men of business cannot bear to be too much cheated; a little cheating we submit to--much cheating raises our gall. _Bref_--this was on Monday. I offered the man 1000 louis above the fair price, and gave him till Thursday to decide. Somehow or other Louvier hears of this. 'Hillo!' says Louvier, 'here is a financier who desires a hotel to vie with mine!' He goes on Wednesday to my next-door neighbour. 'Friend, you want to sell your house. I want to buy--the price?' The proprietor, who does not know him by sight, says: 'It is as good as sold.

M. Duplessis and I shall agree.' 'Bah! What sum did you ask M. Duplessis?' He names the sum; 2000 louis more than he can get elsewhere. 'But M. Duplessis will give me the sum.' 'You ask too little. I will give 3000. A fig for M. Duplessis. I am Monsieur Louvier.' So when I call on Thursday the house is sold. I reconcile myself easily enough to the loss of space for a larger dining-room; but though Valerie was then a child at a convent, I was sadly disconcerted by the thought that I could have no *salle de bal* ready for her when she came to reside with me. Well, I say to myself, patience; I owe M. Louvier a good turn; my time to pay him off will come. It does come, and very soon. M. Louvier buys an estate near Paris--builds a superb villa. Close to his property is a rising forest ground for sale. He goes to the proprietor: says the proprietor to himself, 'The great Louvier wants this,' and adds 5000 louis to its market price. Louvier, like myself, can't bear to be cheated egregiously. Louvier offers 2000 louis more than the man could fairly get, and leaves him till Saturday to consider. I hear of this--speculators hear of everything. On Friday night I go to the man and I give him 6000 louis, where he had asked 5000. Fancy Louvier's face the next day! But there my revenge only begins," continued Duplessis, chuckling inwardly. "My forest looks down on the villa he is building. I only wait till his villa is built, in order to send to my architect and say, Build me a villa at least twice as grand as M. Louvier's, then clear away the forest trees, so that every morning he may see my palace dwarfing into insignificance his own."

"Bravo!" cried Lemerrier, clapping his hands. Lemerrier had the spirit of party, and felt for Duplessis against Louvier much as in England Whig feels against Tory, or vice versa.

"Perhaps now," resumed Duplessis, more soberly,--"perhaps now, M. le Marquis, you may understand why I humiliate you by no sense of obligation if I say that M. Louvier shall not be the Seigneur de Rochebriant if I can help it. Give me a line of introduction to your Breton lawyer and to Mademoiselle your aunt--let me have your letters early to-morrow. I will take the afternoon train. I know not how many days I may be absent, but I shall not return till I have carefully examined the nature and conditions of your property. If I see my way to save your estate, and give a *mauvais quart d'heure* to Louvier, so much the better for you, M. le Marquis; if I cannot, I will say frankly, 'Make the best terms you can with your creditor.'" "Nothing can be more delicately generous than the way you put it," said Alain; "but pardon me, if I say that the pleasantry with which you narrate your grudge against M. Louvier does not answer its purpose in diminishing my sense of obligation." So, linking his arm in Lemerrier's, Alain made his bow and withdrew.

When his guests had gone, Duplessis remained seated in meditation-- apparently pleasant meditation, for he smiled while indulging it; he then passed through the reception-rooms to one at the far end appropriated to Valerie as a boudoir or morning-room, adjoining her bed-chamber; he knocked gently at the door, and, all remaining silent within, he opened it noiselessly and entered. Valerie was reclining on the sofa near the window-her head drooping, her hands clasped on her knees. Duplessis neared her with tender stealthy steps, passed his arm round her, and drew her head towards his bosom. "Child!" he murmured; "my child, my only one!"

At that soft loving voice, Valerie flung her arms round him, and wept aloud like an infant in trouble. He seated himself beside her, and wisely suffered her to weep on, till her passion had exhausted itself; he then said, half fondly, half chillingly: "Have you forgotten our conversation only three days ago? Have you forgotten that I then drew forth the secret of your heart? Have you forgotten what I promised you in return for your confidence? and a promise to you have I ever yet broken?"

"Father! father! I am so wretched and so ashamed of myself for being wretched! Forgive me. No, I do not forget your promise; but who can promise to dispose of the heart of another? and that heart will never be mine. But bear with me a little, I shall soon recover."

"Valerie, when I made you the promise you now think I cannot keep, I spoke only from that conviction of power to promote the happiness of a child which nature implants in the heart of parents; and it may be also from the experience of my own strength of will, since that which I have willed I have always won. Now I speak on yet surer ground. Before the year is out you shall be the beloved wife of Alain de Rochebriant. Dry your tears and smile on me, Valerie. If you will not see in me mother and father both, I have double love for you, motherless child of her who shared the poverty of my youth, and did not live to enjoy the wealth which I hold as a trust for that heir to mine all which she left me."

As this man thus spoke you would scarcely have recognized in him the old saturnine Duplessis, his countenance became so beautified by the one soft feeling which care and contest, ambition and money-seeking, had left unaltered in his heart. Perhaps there is no country in which the love of parent and child, especially of father and daughter, is so strong as it is in France; even in the most arid soil, among the avaricious, even among the profligate, it forces itself into flower. Other loves fade

away: in the heart of the true Frenchman that parent love blooms to the last. Valerie felt the presence of that love as a divine protecting guardianship. She sank on her knees and covered his hand with grateful kisses.

"Do not torture yourself, my child, with jealous fears of the fair Italian. Her lot and Alain de Rochebriant's can never unite; and whatever you may think of their whispered converse, Alain's heart at this moment is too filled with anxious troubles to leave one spot in it accessible even to a frivolous gallantry. It is for us to remove these troubles; and then, when he turns his eyes towards you, it will be with the gaze of one who beholds his happiness. You do not weep now, Valerie!"

PREFATORY NOTE. (BY THE AUTHOR'S SON.)

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

The satire of his earlier novels is a protest against false social respectabilities; the humour of his later ones is a protest against the disrespect of social realities. By the first he sought to promote social sincerity, and the free play of personal character; by the last, to encourage mutual charity and sympathy amongst all classes on whose interrelation depends the character of society itself. But in these three books, his latest fictions, the moral purpose is more definite and exclusive. Each of them is an expostulation against what seemed to him the perilous popularity of certain social and political theories, or a warning against the influence of certain intellectual tendencies upon individual character and national life. This purpose, however, though common to the three fictions, is worked out in each of them by a different method. *The Coming Race* is a work of pure fancy, and the satire of it is vague and sportive. The outlines of a definite purpose are more distinctly drawn in *Chillingly*-a romance which has the source of its effect in a highly-wrought imagination. The humour and pathos of

Chillingly are of a kind incompatible with the design of *The Parisians*, which is a work of dramatised observation. *Chillingly* is a romance; *The Parisians* is a Novel. The subject of *Chillingly* is psychological; that of *The Parisians* is social. The author's object in *Chillingly* being to illustrate the effects of "modern ideas" upon an individual character, he has confined his narrative to the biography of that one character. Hence the simplicity of plot and small number of dramatis personae; whereby the work gains in height and depth what it loses in breadth of surface. *The Parisians*, on the contrary, is designed to illustrate the effect of "modern ideas" upon a whole community. This novel is therefore panoramic in the profusion and variety of figures presented by it to the reader's imagination. No exclusive prominence is vouchsafed to any of these figures. All of them are drawn and coloured with an equal care, but by means of the bold broad touches necessary for their effective presentation on a canvas so large and so crowded. Such figures are, indeed, but the component features of one great Form, and their actions only so many modes of one collective impersonal character—that of the Parisian Society of Imperial and Democratic France;—a character everywhere present and busy throughout the story, of which it is the real hero or heroine. This society was doubtless selected for characteristic illustration as being the most advanced in the progress of "modern ideas." Thus, for a complete perception of its writer's fundamental purpose, *The Parisians* should be read in connection with *Chillingly*, and these two books in connection with *The Coming Race*. It will then be perceived that, through the medium of alternate fancy, sentiment, and observation assisted by humour and passion, these three books (in all other respects so different from each other) complete the presentation of the same purpose under different aspects; and thereby constitute a group of fictions which claims a separate place of its own in any thoughtful classification of their author's works.

One last word to those who will miss from these pages the connecting and completing touches of the master's hand. It may be hoped that such a disadvantage, though irreparable, is somewhat mitigated by the essential character of the work itself. The aesthetic merit of this kind of novel is in the vivacity of a general effect produced by large swift strokes of character; and in such strokes, if they be by a great artist, force and freedom of style must still be apparent, even when they are left rough and unfinished. Nor can any lack of final verbal correction much diminish the intellectual value which many of the more thoughtful passages of the present work derive from a long, keen, and practical study of political phenomena, guided by personal experience of public life, and enlightened by a large, instinctive knowledge of the human heart.

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

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