

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur de Camors

Octave Feuillet

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PREFACE

OCTAVE FEUILLET'S works abound with rare qualities, forming a harmonious ensemble; they also exhibit great observation and knowledge of humanity, and through all of them runs an incomparable and distinctive charm. He will always be considered the leader of the idealistic school in the nineteenth century. It is now fifteen years since his death, and the judgment of posterity is that he had a great imagination, linked to great analytical power and insight; that his style is neat, pure, and fine, and at the same time brilliant and concise. He unites suppleness with force, he combines grace with vigor.

Octave Feuillet was born at Saint-Lo (Manche), August 11, 1821, his father occupying the post of Secretary-General of the Prefecture de la Manche. Pupil at the Lycee Louis le Grand, he received many prizes, and was entered for the law. But he became early attracted to literature, and like many of the writers at that period attached himself to the "romantic school." He collaborated with Alexander Dumas pere and with Paul Bocage. It can not now be ascertained what share Feuillet may have had in any of the countless tales of the elder Dumas. Under his own name he published the novels 'Onesta' and 'Alix', in 1846, his first romances. He then commenced writing for the stage. We mention 'Echec et Mat' (Odeon, 1846); 'Palma, ou la Nuit du Vendredi-Saint' (Porte St. Martin, 1847); 'La Vieillesse de Richelieu' (Theatre Francais, 1848); 'York' (Palais Royal, 1852). Some of them are written in collaboration with Paul Bocage. They are dramas of the Dumas type, conventional, not without cleverness, but making no lasting mark.

Realizing this, Feuillet halted, pondered, abruptly changed front, and began to follow in the footsteps of Alfred de Musset. 'La Grise' (1854), 'Le Village' (1856), 'Dalila' (1857), 'Le Cheveu Blanc', and other plays obtained great success, partly in the Gymnase, partly in the Comedie Francaise. In these works Feuillet revealed himself as an analyst of feminine character, as one who had spied out all their secrets, and could pour balm on all their wounds.

'Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre' (Vaudeville, 1858) is probably the best known of all his later dramas; it was, of course, adapted for the stage from his romance, and is well known to the American public through Lester Wallack and Pierrepont Edwards. 'Tentation' was produced in the year 1860, also well known in this country under the title 'Led Astray'; then followed 'Montjoye' (1863), etc. The influence of Alfred de Musset is henceforth less perceptible. Feuillet now became a follower of Dumas fils, especially so in 'La Belle au Bois Dormant' (Vaudeville, 1865); 'Le Cas de Conscience' (Theatre Francais, 1867); 'Julie' (Theatre Francais 1869). These met with success, and are still in the repertoire of the Comedie Francaise.

As a romancer, Feuillet occupies a high place. For thirty years he was the representative of a noble and tender genre, and was preeminently the favorite novelist of the brilliant society of the Second Empire. Women literally devoured him, and his feminine public has always remained faithful to him. He is the advocate of morality and of the aristocracy of birth and feeling, though under this disguise he involves his heroes and heroines in highly romantic complications, whose outcome is often for a time in doubt. Yet as the accredited painter of the Faubourg Saint-Germain he contributed an essential element to the development of realistic fiction. No one has rendered so well as he the high-strung, neuropathic women of the upper class, who neither understand themselves nor are wholly comprehensible to others. In 'Monsieur de Camors', crowned by the Academy, he has yielded to the demands of a stricter realism. Especially after the fall of the Empire had removed a powerful motive for gilding the vices of aristocratic society, he painted its hard and selfish qualities as none of his contemporaries could have done. Octave Feuillet was elected to the Academie Francaise in 1862 to succeed Scribe. He died December 29, 1890.

MAXIME DU CAMP
de l'Academie Francaise.

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I. "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH"

Near eleven o'clock, one evening in the month of May, a man about fifty years of age, well formed, and of noble carriage, stepped from a coupe in the courtyard of a small hotel in the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. He ascended, with the walk of a master, the steps leading to the entrance, to the hall where several servants awaited him. One of them followed him into an elegant study on the first floor, which communicated with a handsome bedroom, separated from it by a curtained arch. The valet arranged the fire, raised the lamps in both rooms, and was about to retire, when his master spoke:

"Has my son returned home?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte. Monsieur is not ill?"

"Ill! Why?"

"Because Monsieur le Comte is so pale."

"Ah! It is only a slight cold I have taken this evening on the banks of the lake."

"Will Monsieur require anything?"

"Nothing," replied the Count briefly, and the servant retired. Left alone, his master approached a cabinet curiously carved in the Italian style, and took from it a long flat ebony box.

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This contained two pistols. He loaded them with great care, adjusting the caps by pressing them lightly to the nipple with his thumb. That done, he lighted a cigar, and for half an hour the muffled beat of his regular tread sounded on the carpet of the gallery. He finished his cigar, paused a moment in deep thought, and then entered the adjoining room, taking the pistols with him.

This room, like the other, was furnished in a style of severe elegance, relieved by tasteful ornament. It showed some pictures by famous masters, statues, bronzes, and rare carvings in ivory. The Count threw a glance of singular interest round the interior of this chamber, which was his own on the familiar objects on the sombre hangings on the bed, prepared for sleep. Then he turned toward a table, placed in a recess of the window, laid the pistols upon it, and dropping his head in his hands, meditated deeply many minutes. Suddenly he raised his head, and wrote rapidly as follows:

"TO MY SON:

"Life wearies me, my son, and I shall relinquish it. The true superiority of man over the inert or passive creatures that surround him, lies in his power to free himself, at will, from those, pernicious servitudes which are termed the laws of nature. Man, if he will it, need not grow old: the lion must. Reflect, my son, upon this text, for all human power lies in it.

"Science asserts and demonstrates it. Man, intelligent and free, is an animal wholly unpremeditated upon this planet. Produced by unexpected combinations and haphazard transformations, in the midst of a general subordination of matter, he figures as a dissonance and a revolt!

"Nature has engendered without having conceived him. The result is as if a turkey-hen had unconsciously hatched the egg of an eagle. Terrified at the monster, she has sought to control it, and has overloaded it with instincts, commonly called duties, and police regulations known as religion. Each one of these shackles broken, each one of these servitudes overthrown, marks a step toward the thorough emancipation of humanity.

"I must say to you, however, that I die in the faith of my century, believing in matter uncreated, all-powerful, and eternal the Nature of the ancients. There have been in all ages philosophers who have had conceptions of the truth. But ripe to-day, it has become the common property of all who are strong enough to stand it for, in sooth, this latest religion of humanity is food fit only for the strong. It carries sadness with it, for it isolates man; but it also involves grandeur, making man absolutely free, or, as it were, a very god. It leaves him no actual duties except to himself, and it opens a superb field to one of brain and courage.

"The masses still remain, and must ever remain, submissive under the yoke of old, dead religions, and under the tyranny of instincts. There will still be seen very much the same condition of things as at present in Paris; a society the brain of which is atheistic, and the heart religious. And at bottom there will be no more belief in Christ than in Jupiter; nevertheless, churches will continue to be built mechanically. There are no longer even Deists; for the old chimera of a personal, moral God-witness, sanction, and judge, is virtually extinct; and yet hardly a word is said, or a line written, or a gesture made, in public or private life, which does not ever affirm that chimera. This may have its uses perchance, but it is nevertheless despicable. Slip forth from the common herd, my son, think for yourself, and write your own catechism upon a virgin page.

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"As for myself, my life has been a failure, because I was born many years too soon. As yet the earth and the heavens were heaped up and cumbered with ruins, and people did not see. Science, moreover, was relatively still in its infancy. And, besides, I retained the prejudices and the repugnance to the doctrines of the new world that belonged to my name. I was unable to comprehend that there was anything better to be done than childishly to pout at the conqueror; that is, I could not recognize that his weapons were good, and that I should seize and destroy him with them. In short, for want of a definite principle of action I have drifted at random, my life without plan I have been a mere trivial man of pleasure.

"Your life shall be more complete, if you will only follow my advice.

"What, indeed, may not a man of this age become if he have the good sense and energy to conform his life rigidly to his belief!

"I merely state the question, you must solve it; I can leave you only some cursory ideas, which I am satisfied are just, and upon which you may meditate at your leisure. Only for fools or the weak does materialism become a debasing dogma; assuredly, in its code there are none of those precepts of ordinary morals which our fathers entitled virtue; but I do find there a grand word which may well counterbalance many others, that is to say, Honor, self-esteem! Unquestionably a materialist may not be a saint; but he can be a gentleman, which is something. You have happy gifts, my son, and I know of but one duty that you have in the world that of developing those gifts to the utmost, and through them to enjoy life unsparingly. Therefore, without scruple, use woman for your pleasure, man for your advancement; but under no circumstances do anything ignoble.

"In order that ennui shall not drive you, like myself, prematurely from the world so soon as the season for pleasure shall have ended, you should leave the emotions of ambition and of public life for the gratification of your riper age. Do not enter into any engagements with the reigning government, and reserve for yourself to hear its eulogium made by those who will have subverted it. That is the French fashion. Each generation must have its own prey. You will soon feel the impulse of the coming generation. Prepare yourself, from afar, to take the lead in it.

"In politics, my son, you are not ignorant that we all take our principles from our temperament. The bilious are demagogues, the sanguine, democrats, the nervous, aristocrats. You are both sanguine and nervous, an excellent constitution, for it gives you a choice. You may, for example, be an aristocrat in regard to yourself personally, and, at the same time, a democrat in relation to others; and in that you will not be exceptional.

"Make yourself master of every question likely to interest your contemporaries, but do not become absorbed in any yourself. In reality, all principles are indifferent true or false according to the hour and circumstance. Ideas are mere instruments with which you should learn to play seasonably, so as to sway men. In that path, likewise, you will have associates.

"Know, my son, that having attained my age, weary of all else, you will have need of strong sensations. The sanguinary diversions of revolution will then be for you the same as a love-affair at twenty.

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"But I am fatigued, my son, and shall recapitulate. To be loved by women, to be feared by men, to be as impassive and as imperturbable as a god before the tears of the one and the blood of the other, and to end in a whirlwind such has been the lot in which I have failed, but which, nevertheless, I bequeath to you. With your great faculties you, however, are capable of accomplishing it, unless indeed you should fail through some ingrained weakness of the heart that I have noticed in you, and which, doubtless, you have imbibed with your mother's milk.

"So long as man shall be born of woman, there will be something faulty and incomplete in his character. In fine, strive to relieve yourself from all thralldom, from all natural instincts, affections, and sympathies as from so many fetters upon your liberty, your strength.

"Do not marry unless some superior interest shall impel you to do so. In that event, have no children.

"Have no intimate friends. Caesar having grown old, had a friend. It was Brutus!

"Contempt for men is the beginning of wisdom.

"Change somewhat your style of fencing, it is altogether too open, my son. Do not get angry. Rarely laugh, and never weep. Adieu.

"CAMORS."

The feeble rays of dawn had passed through the slats of the blinds. The matin birds began their song in the chestnut-tree near the window. M. de Camors raised his head and listened in an absent mood to the sound which astonished him. Seeing that it was daybreak, he folded in some haste the pages he had just finished, pressed his seal upon the envelope, and addressed it, "For the Comte Louis de Camors." Then he rose.

M. de Camors was a great lover of art, and had carefully preserved a magnificent ivory carving of the sixteenth century, which had belonged to his wife. It was a Christ the pallid white relieved by a medallion of dark velvet.

His eye, meeting this pale, sad image, was attracted to it for a moment with strange fascination. Then he smiled bitterly, seized one of the pistols with a firm hand and pressed it to his temple.

A shot resounded through the house; the fall of a heavy body shook the floor—fragments of brains strewed the carpet. The Comte de Camors had plunged into eternity!

His last will was clenched in his hand.

To whom was this document addressed? Upon what kind of soil will these seeds fall?

At this time Louis de Camors was twenty-seven years old. His mother had died young. It did not appear that she had been particularly happy with her husband; and her son barely remembered her as a young woman, pretty and pale, and frequently weeping, who used to sing him to sleep in a low, sweet voice. He had been brought up chiefly by his father's mistress, who was known as the Vicomtesse d'Oilly, a widow, and a rather good sort of woman. Her natural sensibility, and the laxity of morals then reigning at Paris, permitted her to occupy herself at the same time with the happiness of the father and the education of the son. When the father deserted her after a time, he left her the child, to comfort her somewhat by this mark of confidence and affection. She took him out three times a week; she dressed him and combed him; she fondled him and took him with her to church, and made him play with a handsome Spaniard, who had been for some time her secretary. Besides, she neglected no opportunity of

inculcating precepts of sound morality. Thus the child, being surprised at seeing her one evening press a kiss upon the forehead of her secretary, cried out, with the blunt candor of his age:

"Why, Madame, do you kiss a gentleman who is not your husband?"

"Because, my dear," replied the Countess, "our good Lord commands us to be charitable and affectionate to the poor, the infirm, and the exile; and Monsieur Perez is an exile."

Louis de Camors merited better care, for he was a generous-hearted child; and his comrades of the college of Louis-le-Grand always remembered the warm-heartedness and natural grace which made them forgive his successes during the week, and his varnished boots and lilac gloves on Sunday. Toward the close of his college course, he became particularly attached to a poor bursar, by name Lescande, who excelled in mathematics, but who was very ungraceful, awkwardly shy and timid, with a painful sensitiveness to the peculiarities of his person. He was nicknamed "Wolfhead," from the refractory nature of his hair; but the elegant Camors stopped the scoffers by protecting the young man with his friendship. Lescande felt this deeply, and adored his friend, to whom he opened the inmost recesses of his heart, letting out some important secrets.

He loved a very young girl who was his cousin, but was as poor as himself. Still it was a providential thing for him that she was poor, otherwise he never should have dared to aspire to her. It was a sad occurrence that had first thrown Lescande with his cousin the loss of her father, who was chief of one of the Departments of State.

After his death she lived with her mother in very straitened circumstances; and Lescande, on occasion of his last visit, found her with soiled cuffs. Immediately after he received the following note:

"Pardon me, dear cousin! Pardon my not wearing white cuffs. But I must tell you that we can change our cuffs my mother and I only three times a week. As to her, one would never discover it. She is neat as a bird. I also try to be; but, alas! when I practise the piano, my cuffs rub. After this explanation, my good Theodore, I hope you will love me as before.

"JULIETTE."

Lescande wept over this note. Luckily he had his prospects as an architect; and Juliette had promised to wait for him ten years, by which time he would either be dead, or living deliciously in a humble house with his cousin. He showed the note, and unfolded his plans to Camors. "This is the only ambition I have, or which I can have," added Lescande. "You are different. You are born for great things."

"Listen, my old Lescande," replied Camors, who had just passed his rhetoric examination in triumph. "I do not know but that my destiny may be ordinary; but I am sure my heart can never be. There I feel transports passions, which give me sometimes great joy, sometimes inexpressible suffering. I burn to discover a world to save a nation to love a queen! I understand nothing but great ambitions and noble alliances, and as for sentimental love, it troubles me but little. My activity pants for a nobler and a wider field!

"I intend to attach myself to one of the great social parties, political or religious, that agitate the world at this era. Which one I know not yet, for my opinions are not very fixed. But as soon as I leave college I shall devote myself to seeking the truth. And truth is easily found. I shall read all the newspapers.

"Besides, Paris is an intellectual highway, so brilliantly lighted it is only necessary to open one's eyes and have good faith and independence, to find the true road.

And I am in excellent case for this, for though born a gentleman, I have no prejudices. My father, who is himself very enlightened and very liberal, leaves me free. I have an uncle who is a Republican; an aunt who is a

Legitimist and what is still more, a saint; and another uncle who is a Conservative. It is not vanity that leads me to speak of these things; but only a desire to show you that, having a foot in all parties, I am quite willing to compare them dispassionately and make a good choice. Once master of the holy truth, you may be sure, dear old Lescande, I shall serve it unto death with my tongue, with my pen, and with my sword!"

Such sentiments as these, pronounced with sincere emotion and accompanied by a warm clasp of the hand, drew tears from the old Lescande, otherwise called Wolfhead.

CHAPTER II. FRUIT FROM THE HOTBED OF PARIS

Early one morning, about eight years after these high resolves, Louis de Camors rode out from the 'porte-cochere' of the small hotel he had occupied with his father.

Nothing could be gayer than Paris was that morning, at that charming golden hour of the day when the world seems peopled only with good and generous spirits who love one another. Paris does not pique herself on her generosity; but she still takes to herself at this charming hour an air of innocence, cheerfulness, and amiable cordiality.

The little carts with bells, that pass one another rapidly, make one believe the country is covered with roses. The cries of old Paris cut with their sharp notes the deep murmur of a great city just awaking.

You see the jolly concierges sweeping the white footpaths; half-dressed merchants taking down their shutters with great noise; and groups of ostlers, in Scotch caps, smoking and fraternizing on the hotel steps.

You hear the questions of the sociable neighborhood; the news proper to awakening; speculations on the weather bandied across from door to door, with much interest.

Young milliners, a little late, walk briskly toward town with elastic step, making now a short pause before a shop just opened; again taking wing like a bee just scenting a flower.

Even the dead in this gay Paris morning seem to go gayly to the cemetery, with their jovial coachmen grinning and nodding as they pass.

Superbly aloof from these agreeable impressions, Louis de Camors, a little pale, with half-closed eyes and a cigar between his teeth, rode into the Rue de Bourgogne at a walk, broke into a canter on the Champs Elysees, and galloped thence to the Bois. After a brisk run, he returned by chance through the Porte Maillot, then not nearly so thickly inhabited as it is to-day. Already, however, a few pretty houses, with green lawns in front, peeped out from the bushes of lilac and clematis. Before the green railings of one of these a gentleman played hoop with a very young, blond-haired child. His age belonged in that uncertain area which may range from twenty-five to forty. He wore a white cravat, spotless as snow; and two triangles of short, thick beard, cut like the boxwood at Versailles, ornamented his cheeks. If Camors saw this personage he did not honor him with the slightest notice. He was, notwithstanding, his former comrade Lescande, who had been lost sight of for several years by his warmest college friend. Lescande, however, whose memory seemed better, felt his heart leap with joy at the majestic appearance of the young cavalier who approached him. He made a movement to rush forward; a smile covered his good-natured face, but it ended in a grimace. Evidently he had been forgotten. Camors, now not more than a couple of feet from him, was passing on, and his handsome countenance gave not the slightest sign of emotion. Suddenly, without changing a single line of his face, he drew rein, took the cigar from his lips, and said, in a tranquil voice:

"Hello! You have no longer a wolf head!"

"Ha! Then you know me?" cried Lescande.

"Know you? Why not?"

"I thought I was afraid on account of my beard "

"Bah! your beard does not change you except that it becomes you. But what are you doing here?"

"Doing here! Why, my dear friend, I am at home here. Dismount, I pray you, and come into my house."

"Well, why not?" replied Camors, with the same voice and manner of supreme indifference; and, throwing his bridle to the servant who followed him, he passed through the gardengate, led, supported, caressed by the trembling hand of Lescande.

The garden was small, but beautifully tended and full of rare plants. At the end, a small villa, in the Italian style, showed its graceful porch.

"Ah, that is pretty!" exclaimed Camors, at last.

"And you recognize my plan, Number Three, do you not?" asked Lescande, eagerly.

"Your plan Number Three? Ah, yes, perfectly," replied Camors, absently. "And your pretty little cousin is she within?"

"She is there, my dear friend," answered Lescande, in a low voice and he pointed to the closed shutters of a large window of a balcony surmounting the veranda. "She is there; and this is our son."

Camors let his hand pass listlessly over the child's hair. "The deuce!" he said; "but you have not wasted time. And you are happy, my good fellow?"

"So happy, my dear friend, that I am sometimes uneasy, for the good God is too kind to me. It is true, though, I had to work very hard. For instance, I passed two years in Spain in the mountains of that infernal country. There I built a fairy palace for the Marquis of Buena-Vista, a great nobleman, who had seen my plan at the Exhibition and was delighted with it. This was the beginning of my fortune; but you must not imagine that my profession alone has enriched me so quickly. I made some successful speculations some unheard of chances in lands; and, I beg you to believe, honestly, too. Still, I am not a millionaire; but you know I had nothing, and my wife less; now, my house paid for, we have ten thousand francs' income left. It is not a fortune for us, living in this style; but I still work and keep good courage, and my Juliette is happy in her paradise!"

"She wears no more soiled cuffs, then?" said Camors.

"I warrant she does not! Indeed, she has a slight tendency to luxury like all women, you know. But I am delighted to see you remember so well our college follies. I also, through all my distractions, never forgot you a moment. I even had a foolish idea of asking you to my wedding, only I did not dare. You are so brilliant, so petted, with your establishment and your racers. My wife knows you very well; in fact, we have talked of you a hundred thousand times. Since she patronizes the turf and subscribes for 'The Sport', she says to me, 'Your friend's horse has won again'; and in our family circle we rejoice over your triumphs."

A flush tinged the cheek of Camors as he answered, quietly, "You are really too good."

They walked a moment in silence over the gravel path bordered by grass, before Lescande spoke again.

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"And yourself, dear friend, I hope that you also are happy."

"I happy!" Camors seemed a little astonished. "My happiness is simple enough, but I believe it is unclouded. I rise in the morning, ride to the Bois, thence to the club, go to the Bois again, and then back to the club. If there is a first representation at any theatre, I wish to see it. Thus, last evening they gave a new piece which was really exquisite. There was a song in it, beginning:

"He was a woodpecker,
A little woodpecker,
A young woodpecker

and the chorus imitated the cry of the woodpecker! Well, it was charming, and the whole of Paris will sing that song with delight for a year. I also shall do like the whole of Paris, and I shall be happy."

"Good heavens! my friend," laughed Lescande, "and that suffices you for happiness?"

"That and the principles of 'eighty-nine," replied Camors, lighting a fresh cigar from the old one.

Here their dialogue was broken by the fresh voice of a woman calling from the blinds of the balcony

"Is that you, Theodore?"

Camors raised his eyes and saw a white hand, resting on the slats of the blind, bathed in sunlight.

"That is my wife. Conceal yourself!" cried Lescande, briskly; and he pushed Camors behind a clump of catalpas, as he turned to the balcony and lightly answered:

"Yes, my dear; do you wish anything?"

"Maxime is with you?"

"Yes, mother. I am here," cried the child. "It is a beautiful morning. Are you quite well?"

"I hardly know. I have slept too long, I believe." She opened the shutters, and, shading her eyes from the glare with her hand, appeared on the balcony.

She was in the flower of youth, slight, supple, and graceful, and appeared, in her ample morning-gown of blue cashmere, plumper and taller than she really was. Bands of the same color interlaced, in the Greek fashion, her chestnut hair which nature, art, and the night had dishevelled waved and curled to admiration on her small head.

She rested her elbows on the railing, yawned, showing her white teeth, and looking at her husband, asked:

"Why do you look so stupid?"

At the instant she observed Camors whom the interest of the moment had withdrawn from his concealment gave a startled cry, gathered up her skirts, and retired within the room.

Since leaving college up to this hour, Louis de Camors had never formed any great opinion of the Juliet who had taken Lescande as her Romeo. He experienced a flash of agreeable surprise on discovering that his friend was more happy in that respect than he had supposed.

"I am about to be scolded, my friend," said Lescande, with a hearty laugh, "and you also must stay for your share. You will stay and breakfast with us?"

Camors hesitated; then said, hastily, "No, no! Impossible! I have an engagement which I must keep."

Notwithstanding Camors's unwillingness, Lescande detained him until he had extorted a promise to come and dine with them that is, with him, his wife, and his mother-in-law, Madame Mursois on the following Tuesday. This acceptance left a cloud on the spirit of Camors until the appointed day. Besides abhorring family dinners, he objected to being reminded of the scene of the balcony. The indiscreet kindness of Lescande both touched and irritated him; for he knew he should play but a silly part near this pretty woman. He felt sure she was a coquette, notwithstanding which, the recollections of his youth and the character of her husband should make her sacred to him. So he was not in the most agreeable frame of mind when he stepped out of his dog-cart, that Tuesday evening, before the little villa of the Avenue Maillot.

At his reception by Madame Lescande and her mother he took heart a little. They appeared to him what they were, two honest-hearted women, surrounded by luxury and elegance. The mother an ex-beauty had been left a widow when very young, and to this time had avoided any stain on her character. With them, innate delicacy held the place of those solid principles so little tolerated by French society. Like a few other women of society, Madame had the quality of virtue just as ermine has the quality of whiteness. Vice was not so repugnant to her as an evil as it was as a blemish. Her daughter had received from her those instincts of chastity which are oftener than we imagine hidden under the appearance of pride. But these amiable women had one unfortunate caprice, not uncommon at this day among Parisians of their position. Although rather clever, they bowed down, with the adoration of bourgeois, before that aristocracy, more or less pure, that paraded up and down the Champs Elysees, in the theatres, at the race-course, and on the most frequented promenades, its frivolous affairs and rival vanities.

Virtuous themselves, they read with interest the daintiest bits of scandal and the most equivocal adventures that took place among the elite. It was their happiness and their glory to learn the smallest details of the high life of Paris; to follow its feasts, speak in its slang, copy its toiles, and read its favorite books. So that if not the rose, they could at least be near the rose and become impregnated with her colors and her perfumes. Such apparent familiarity heightened them singularly in their own estimation and in that of their associates.

Now, although Camors did not yet occupy that bright spot in the heaven of fashion which was surely to be his one day, still he could here pass for a demigod, and as such inspire Madame Lescande and her mother with a sentiment of most violent curiosity. His early intimacy with Lescande had always connected a peculiar interest with his name: and they knew the names of his horses most likely knew the names of his mistresses.

So it required all their natural tact to conceal from their guest the flutter of their nerves caused by his sacred presence; but they did succeed, and so well that Camors was slightly piqued. If not a coxcomb, he was at least young; he was accustomed to please: he knew the Princess de Clam-Goritz had lately applied to him her learned definition of an agreeable man "He is charming, for one always feels in danger near him!"

Consequently, it seemed a little strange to him that the simple mother of the simple wife of simple Lescande should be able to bear his radiance with such calmness; and this brought him out of his premeditated reserve.

He took the trouble to be irresistible not to Madame Lescande, to whom he was studiously respectful but to Madame Mursois. The whole evening he scattered around the mother the social epigrams intended to dazzle the daughter; Lescande meanwhile sitting with his mouth open, delighted with the success of his old schoolfellow.

Next afternoon, Camors, returning from his ride in the Bois, by chance passed the Avenue Maillot. Madame Lescande was embroidering on the balcony, by chance, and returned his salute over her tapestry. He remarked,

too, that she saluted very gracefully, by a slight inclination of the head, followed by a slight movement of her symmetrical, sloping shoulders.

When he called upon her two or three days after as was only his duty Camors reflected on a strong resolution he had made to keep very cool, and to expatiate to Madame Lescande only on her husband's virtues. This pious resolve had an unfortunate effect; for Madame, whose virtue had been piqued, had also reflected; and while an obtrusive devotion had not failed to frighten her, this course only reassured her. So she gave up without restraint to the pleasure of receiving in her boudoir one of the brightest stars from the heaven of her dreams.

It was now May, and at the races of La Marche to take place the following Sunday Camors was to be one of the riders. Madame Mursois and her daughter prevailed upon Lescande to take them, while Camors completed their happiness by admitting them to the weighing-stand. Further, when they walked past the judge's stand, Madame Mursois, to whom he gave his arm, had the delight of being escorted in public by a cavalier in an orange jacket and topboots. Lescande and his wife followed in the wake of the radiant mother-in-law, partaking of her ecstasy.

These agreeable relations continued for several weeks, without seeming to change their character. One day Camors would seat himself by the lady, before the palace of the Exhibition, and initiate her into the mysteries of all the fashionables who passed before them. Another time he would drop into their box at the opera, deign to remain there during an act or two, and correct their as yet incomplete views of the morals of the ballet. But in all these interviews he held toward Madame Lescande the language and manner of a brother: perhaps because he secretly persisted in his delicate resolve; perhaps because he was not ignorant that every road leads to Rome and one as surely as another.

Madame Lescande reassured herself more and more; and feeling it unnecessary to be on her guard, as at first, thought she might permit herself a little levity. No woman is flattered at being loved only as a sister.

Camors, a little disquieted by the course things were taking, made some slight effort to divert it. But, although men in fencing wish to spare their adversaries, sometimes they find habit too strong for them, and lunge home in spite of themselves. Besides, he began to be really interested in Madame Lescande in her coquettish ways, at once artful and simple, provoking and timid, suggestive and reticent in short, charming.

The same evening that M. de Camors, the elder, returned to his home bent on suicide, his son, passing up the Avenue Maillot, was stopped by Lescande on the threshold of his villa.

"My friend," said the latter, "as you are here you can do me a great favor. A telegram calls me suddenly to Melun I must go on the instant. The ladies will be so lonely, pray stay and dine with them! I can't tell what the deuce ails my wife. She has been weeping all day over her tapestry; my mother-in-law has a headache. Your presence will cheer them. So stay, I beg you."

Camors refused, hesitated, made objections, and consented. He sent back his horse, and his friend presented him to the ladies, whom the presence of the unexpected guest seemed to cheer a little. Lescande stepped into his carriage and departed, after receiving from his wife an embrace more fervent than usual.

The dinner was gay. In the atmosphere was that subtle suggestion of coming danger of which both Camors and Madame Lescande felt the exhilarating influence. Their excitement, as yet innocent, employed itself in those lively sallies those brilliant combats at the barriers that ever precede the more serious conflict. About nine o'clock the headache of Madame Mursois perhaps owing to the cigar they had allowed Camors became more violent. She declared she could endure it no longer, and must retire to her chamber. Camors wished to withdraw, but his carriage had not yet arrived and Madame Mursois insisted that he should wait for it.

"Let my daughter amuse you with a little music until then," she added.

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Left alone with her guest, the younger lady seemed embarrassed. "What shall I play for you?" she asked, in a constrained voice, taking her seat at the piano.

"Oh! anything play a waltz," answered Camors, absently.

The waltz finished, an awkward silence ensued. To break it she arose hesitatingly; then clasping her hands together exclaimed, "It seems to me there is a storm. Do you not think so?" She approached the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. In a second Camors was at her side.

The night was beautifully clear. Before them stretched the sombre shadow of the wood, while nearer trembling rays of moonlight slept upon the lawn.

How still all was! Their trembling hands met and for a moment did not separate.

"Juliette!" whispered the young man, in a low, broken voice. She shuddered, repelled the arm that Camors passed round her, and hastily reentered the room.

"Leave me, I pray you!" she cried, with an impetuous gesture of her hand, as she sank upon the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

Of course Camors did not obey. He seated himself by her.

In a little while Juliette awoke from her trance; but she awoke a lost woman!

How bitter was that awakening! She measured at a first glance the depth of the awful abyss into which she had suddenly plunged. Her husband, her mother, her infant, whirled like spectres in the mad chaos of her brain.

Sensible of the anguish of an irreparable wrong, she rose, passed her hand vacantly across her brow, and muttering, "Oh, God! oh, God!" peered vainly into the dark for light hope refuge! There was none!

Her tortured soul cast herself utterly on that of her lover. She turned her swimming eyes on him and said:

"How you must despise me!"

Camors, half kneeling on the carpet near her, kissed her hand indifferently and half raised his shoulders in sign of denial. "Is it not so?" she repeated. "Answer me, Louis."

His face wore a strange, cruel smile "Do not insist on an answer, I pray you," he said.

"Then I am right? You do despise me?"

Camors turned himself abruptly full toward her, looked straight in her face, and said, in a cold, hard voice, "I do!"

To this cruel speech the poor child replied by a wild cry that seemed to rend her, while her eyes dilated as if under the influence of strong poison. Camors strode across the room, then returned and stood by her as he said, in a quick, violent tone:

"You think I am brutal? Perhaps I am, but that can matter little now. After the irreparable wrong I have done you, there is one service and only one which I can now render you. I do it now, and tell you the truth. Understand me clearly; women who fall do not judge themselves more harshly than their accomplices judge them. For myself, what would you have me think of you?"

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"To his misfortune and my shame, I have known your husband since his boyhood. There is not a drop of blood in his veins that does not throb for you; there is not a thought of his day nor a dream of his night that is not yours; your every comfort comes from his sacrifices your every joy from his exertion! See what he is to you!

"You have only seen my name in the journals; you have seen me ride by your window; I have talked a few times with you, and you yield to me in one moment the whole of his life with your own the whole of his happiness with your own.

"I tell you, woman, every man like me, who abuses your vanity and your weakness and afterward tells you he esteems you lies! And if after all you still believe he loves you, you do yourself fresh injury. No: we soon learn to hate those irksome ties that become duties where we only sought pleasures; and the first effort after they are formed is to shatter them.

"As for the rest: women like you are not made for unholy love like ours. Their charm is their purity, and losing that, they lose everything. But it is a blessing to them to encounter one wretch, like myself, who cares to say Forget me, forever! Farewell!"

He left her, passed from the room with rapid strides, and, slamming the door behind him, disappeared. Madame Lescande, who had listened, motionless, and pale as marble, remained in the same lifeless attitude, her eyes fixed, her hands clenched yearning from the depths of her heart that death would summon her. Suddenly a singular noise, seeming to come from the next room, struck her ear. It was only a convulsive sob, or violent and smothered laughter. The wildest and most terrible ideas crowded to the mind of the unhappy woman; the foremost of them, that her husband had secretly returned, that he knew all that his brain had given way, and that the laughter was the gibbering of his madness.

Feeling her own brain begin to reel, she sprang from the sofa, and rushing to the door, threw it open. The next apartment was the dining– room, dimly lighted by a hanging lamp. There she saw Camors, crouched upon the floor, sobbing furiously and beating his forehead against a chair which he strained in a convulsive embrace. Her tongue refused its office; she could find no word, but seating herself near him, gave way to her emotion, and wept silently. He dragged himself nearer, seized the hem of her dress and covered it with kisses; his breast heaved tumultuously, his lips trembled and he gasped the almost inarticulate words, "Pardon! Oh, pardon me!"

This was all. Then he rose suddenly, rushed from the house, and the instant after she heard the rolling of the wheels as his carriage whirled him away.

If there were no morals and no remorse, French people would perhaps be happier. But unfortunately it happens that a young woman, who believes in little, like Madame Lescande, and a young man who believes in nothing, like M. de Camors, can not have the pleasures of an independent code of morals without suffering cruelly afterward.

A thousand old prejudices, which they think long since buried, start up suddenly in their consciences; and these revived scruples are nearly fatal to them.

Camors rushed toward Paris at the greatest speed of his thoroughbred, Fitz–Aymon, awakening along the route, by his elegance and style, sentiments of envy which would have changed to pity were the wounds of the heart visible. Bitter weariness, disgust of life and disgust for himself, were no new sensations to this young man; but he never had experienced them in such poignant intensity as at this cursed hour, when flying from the dishonored hearth of the friend of his boyhood. No action of his life had ever thrown such a flood of light on the depths of his infamy in doing such gross outrage to the friend of his purer days, to the dear confidant of the generous thoughts and proud aspirations of his youth. He knew he had trampled all these under foot. Like Macbeth, he had not only murdered one asleep, but had murdered sleep itself.

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His reflections became insupportable. He thought successively of becoming a monk, of enlisting as a soldier, and of getting drunk ere he reached the corner of the Rue Royale and the Boulevard. Chance favored his last design, for as he alighted in front of his club, he found himself face to face with a pale young man, who smiled as he extended his hand. Camors recognized the Prince d'Errol.

"The deuce! You here, my Prince! I thought you in Cairo."

"I arrived only this morning."

"Ah, then you are better? Your chest?"

"So so."

"Bah! you look perfectly well. And isn't Cairo a strange place?"

"Rather; but I really believe Providence has sent you to me."

"You really think so, my Prince? But why?"

"Because pshaw! I'll tell you by—and–bye; but first I want to hear all about your quarrel."

"What quarrel?"

"Your duel for Sarah."

"That is to say, against Sarah!"

"Well, tell me all that passed; I heard of it only vaguely while abroad."

"Well, I only strove to do a good action, and, according to custom, I was punished for it. I heard it said that that little imbecile La Brede borrowed money from his little sister to lavish it upon that Sarah. This was so unnatural that you may believe it first disgusted, and then irritated me. One day at the club I could not resist saying, 'You are an ass, La Bride, to ruin yourself worse than that, to ruin your sister, for the sake of a snail, as little sympathetic as Sarah, a girl who always has a cold in her head, and who has already deceived you.' 'Deceived me!' cried La Brede, waving his long arms. 'Deceived me! and with whom?' 'With me.' As he knew I never lied, he panted for my life. Luckily my life is a tough one."

"You put him in bed for three months, I hear."

"Almost as long as that, yes. And now, my friend, do me a service. I am a bear, a savage, a ghost! Assist me to return to life. Let us go and sup with some sprightly people whose virtue is extraordinary."

"Agreed! That is recommended by my physician."

"From Cairo? Nothing could be better, my Prince."

Half an hour later Louis de Camors, the Prince d'Errol, and a half–dozen guests of both sexes, took possession of an apartment, the closed doors of which we must respect.

Next morning, at gray dawn, the party was about to disperse; and at the moment a ragpicker, with a gray beard, was wandering up and down before the restaurant, raking with his hook in the refuse that awaited the public

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sweepers. In closing his purse, with an unsteady hand, Camors let fall a shining louis d'or, which rolled into the mud on the sidewalk. The ragpicker looked up with a timid smile.

"Ah! Monsieur," he said, "what falls into the trench should belong to the soldier."

"Pick it up with your teeth, then," answered Camors, laughing, "and it is yours."

The man hesitated, flushed under his sunburned cheeks, and threw a look of deadly hatred upon the laughing group round him. Then he knelt, buried his chest in the mire, and sprang up next moment with the coin clenched between his sharp white teeth. The spectators applauded. The chiffonnier smiled a dark smile, and turned away.

"Hello, my friend!" cried Camors, touching his arm, "would you like to earn five Louis? If so, give me a knock-down blow. That will give you pleasure and do me good."

The man turned, looked him steadily in the eye, then suddenly dealt him such a blow in the face that he reeled against the opposite wall. The young men standing by made a movement to fall upon the graybeard.

"Let no one harm him!" cried Camors. "Here, my man, are your hundred francs."

"Keep them," replied the other, "I am paid;" and walked away.

"Bravo, Belisarius!" laughed Camors. "Faith, gentlemen, I do not know whether you agree with me, but I am really charmed with this little episode. I must go dream upon it. By-bye, young ladies! Good-day, Prince!"

An early cab was passing, he jumped in, and was driven rapidly to his hotel, on the Rue Babet-de-Jouy.

The door of the courtyard was open, but being still under the influence of the wine he had drunk, he failed to notice a confused group of servants and neighbors standing before the stable-doors. Upon seeing him, these people became suddenly silent, and exchanged looks of sympathy and compassion. Camors occupied the second floor of the hotel; and ascending the stairs, found himself suddenly facing his father's valet. The man was very pale, and held a sealed paper, which he extended with a trembling hand.

"What is it, Joseph?" asked Camors.

"A letter which which Monsieur le Comte wrote for you before he left."

"Before he left! my father is gone, then? But where how? What, the devil! why do you weep?"

Unable to speak, the servant handed him the paper. Camors seized it and tore it open.

"Good God! there is blood! what is this!" He read the first words "My son, life is a burden to me. I leave it " and fell fainting to the floor.

The poor lad loved his father, notwithstanding the past.

They carried him to his chamber.

CHAPTER III. DEBRIS FROM THE REVOLUTION

De Camors, on leaving college had entered upon life with a heart swelling with the virtues of youth confidence,

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enthusiasm, sympathy. The horrible neglect of his early education had not corrupted in his veins those germs of weakness which, as his father declared, his mother's milk had deposited there; for that father, by shutting him up in a college to get rid of him for twelve years, had rendered him the greatest service in his power.

Those classic prisons surely do good. The healthy discipline of the school; the daily contact of young, fresh hearts; the long familiarity with the best works, powerful intellects, and great souls of the ancients all these perhaps may not inspire a very rigid morality, but they do inspire a certain sentimental ideal of life and of duty which has its value.

The vague heroism which Camors first conceived he brought away with him. He demanded nothing, as you may remember, but the practical formula for the time and country in which he was destined to live. He found, doubtless, that the task he set himself was more difficult than he had imagined; that the truth to which he would devote himself but which he must first draw from the bottom of its well did not stand upon many compliments. But he failed no preparation to serve her valiantly as a man might, as soon as she answered his appeal. He had the advantage of several years of opposing to the excitements of his age and of an opulent life the austere meditations of the poor student.

During that period of ardent, laborious youth, he faithfully shut himself up in libraries, attended public lectures, and gave himself a solid foundation of learning, which sometimes awakened surprise when discovered under the elegant frivolity of the gay turfman. But while arming himself for the battle of life, he lost, little by little, what was more essential than the best weapons—true courage.

In proportion as he followed Truth day by day, she flew before and eluded him, taking, like an unpleasant vision, the form of the thousand-headed Chimera.

About the middle of the last century, Paris was so covered with political and religious ruins, that the most piercing vision could scarcely distinguish the outlines of the fresh structures of the future. One could, see that everything was overthrown; but one could not see any power that was to raise the ruins. Over the confused wrecks and remains of the Past, the powerful intellectual life of the Present—Progress the collision of ideas the flame of French wit, criticism and the sciences threw a brilliant light, which, like the sun of earlier ages, illuminated the chaos without making it productive. The phenomena of Life and of Death were commingled in one huge fermentation, in which everything decomposed and whence nothing seemed to spring up again.

At no period of history, perhaps, has Truth been less simple, more enveloped in complications; for it seemed that all essential notions of humanity had been fused in a great furnace, and none had come out whole.

The spectacle is grand; but it troubles profoundly all souls or at least those that interest and curiosity do not suffice to fill; which is to say, nearly all. To disengage from this bubbling chaos one pure religious moral, one positive social idea, one fixed political creed, were an enterprise worthy of the most sincere. This should not be beyond the strength of a man of good intentions; and Louis de Camors might have accomplished the task had he been aided by better instruction and guidance.

It is the common misfortune of those just entering life to find in it less than their ideal. But in this respect Camors was born under a particularly unfortunate star, for he found in his surroundings in his own family even only the worst side of human nature; and, in some respects, of those very opinions to which he was tempted to adhere.

The Camors were originally from Brittany, where they had held, in the eighteenth century, large possessions, particularly some extensive forests, which still bear their name. The grandfather of Louis, the Comte Herve de Camors, had, on his return from the emigration, bought back a small part of the hereditary demesne. There he established himself in the old-fashioned style, and nourished until his death incurable prejudices against the French Revolution and against Louis XVIII.

Count Herve had four children, two boys and two girls, and, feeling it his duty to protest against the levelling influences of the Civil Code, he established during his life, by a legal subterfuge, a sort of entail in favor of his eldest son, Charles-Henri, to the prejudice of Robert-Sosthene, Eleanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth, his other heirs. Eleanore-Jeanne and Louise-Elizabeth accepted with apparent willingness the act that benefited their brother at their expense notwithstanding which they never forgave him. But Robert-Sosthene, who, in his position as representative of the younger branch, affected Liberal leanings and was besides loaded with debt, rebelled against the paternal procedure. He burned his visiting-cards, ornamented with the family crest and his name "Chevalier Lange d'Ardennes" and had others printed, simply "Dardennes, junior (du Morbihan)."

Of these he sent a specimen to his father, and from that hour became a declared Republican.

There are people who attach themselves to a party by their virtues; others, again, by their vices. No recognized political party exists which does not contain some true principle; which does not respond to some legitimate aspiration of human society. At the same time, there is not one which can not serve as a pretext, as a refuge, and as a hope, for the basest passions of our nature.

The most advanced portion of the Liberal party of France is composed of generous spirits, ardent and absolute, who torture a really elevated ideal; that of a society of manhood, constituted with a sort of philosophic perfection; her own mistress each day and each hour; delegating few of her powers, and yielding none; living, not without laws, but without rulers; and, in short, developing her activity, her well-being, her genius, with that fulness of justice, of independence, and of dignity, which republicanism alone gives to all and to each one.

Every other system appears to them to preserve some of the slaveries and iniquities of former ages; and it also appears open to the suspicion of generating diverse interests and often hostile ones between the governors and the governed. They claim for all that political system which, without doubt, holds humanity in the most esteem; and however one may despise the practical working of their theory, the grandeur of its principles can not be despised.

They are in reality a proud race, great-hearted and high-spirited. They have had in their age their heroes and their martyrs; but they have had, on the other hand, their hypocrites, their adventurers, and their radicals their greatest enemies.

Young Dardennes, to obtain grace for the equivocal origin of his convictions, placed himself in the front rank of these last.

Until he left college Louis de Camors never knew his uncle, who had remained on bad terms with his father; but he entertained for him, in secret; an enthusiastic admiration, attributing to him all the virtues of that principle of which he seemed the exponent.

The Republic of '48 soon died: his uncle was among the vanquished; and this, to the young man, had but an additional attraction. Without his father's knowledge, he went to see him, as if on a pilgrimage to a holy shrine; and he was well received.

He found his uncle exasperated not so much against his enemies as against his own party, to which he attributed all the disasters of the cause.

"They never can make revolutions with gloves on," he said in a solemn, dogmatic tone. "The men of 'ninety-three did not wear them. You can not make an omelette without first breaking the eggs.

"The pioneers of the future should march on, axe in hand!

"The chrysalis of the people is not hatched upon roses!

"Liberty is a goddess who demands great holocausts. Had they made a Reign of Terror in 'forty-eight, they would now be masters!"

These high-flown maxims astonished Louis de Camors. In his youthful simplicity he had an infinite respect for the men who had governed his country in her darkest hour; not more that they had given up power as poor as when they assumed it, than that they left it with their hands unstained with blood: To this praise which will be accorded them in history, which redresses many contemporary injustices he added a reproach which he could not reconcile with the strange regrets of his uncle. He reproached them with not having more boldly separated the New Republic, in its management and minor details, from the memories of the old one. Far from agreeing with his uncle that a revival of the horrors of 'ninety-three would have assured the triumph of the New Republic, he believed it had sunk under the bloody shadow of its predecessor. He believed that, owing to this boasted Terror, France had been for centuries the only country in which the dangers of liberty outweighed its benefits.

It is useless to dwell longer on the relations of Louis de Camors with his uncle Dardennes. It is enough that he was doubtful and discouraged, and made the error of holding the cause responsible for the violence of its lesser apostles, and that he adopted the fatal error, too common in France at that period, of confounding progress with discord, liberty with license, and revolution with terrorism!

The natural result of irritation and disenchantment on this ardent spirit was to swing it rapidly around to the opposite pole of opinion. After all, Camors argued, his birth, his name, his family ties all pointed out his true course, which was to combat the cruel and despotic doctrines which he believed he detected under these democratic theories. Another thing in the habitual language of his uncle also shocked and repelled him the profession of an absolute atheism. He had within him, in default of a formal creed, a fund of general belief and respect for holy things that kind of religious sensibility which was shocked by impious cynicism. Further he could not comprehend then, or ever afterward, how principles alone, without faith in some higher sanction, could sustain themselves by their own strength in the human conscience.

God or no principles! This was the dilemma from which no German philosophy could rescue him.

This reaction in his mind drew him closer to those other branches of his family which he had hitherto neglected. His two aunts, living at Paris, had been compelled, in consequence of their small fortunes, to make some sacrifices to enter into the blessed state of matrimony. The elder, Eleanore-Jeanne, had married, during her father's life, the Comte de la Roche-Jugan a man long past fifty, but still well worthy of being loved. Nevertheless, his wife did not love him. Their views on many essential points differed widely. M. de la Roche-Jugan was one of those who had served the Government of the Restoration with an unshaken but hopeless devotion. In his youth he had been attached to the person and to the ministry of the Duc de Richelieu; and he had preserved the memory of that illustrious man of the elevated moderation of his sentiments of the warmth of his patriotism and of his constancy. He saw the pitfalls ahead, pointed them out to his prince displeased him by so doing, but still followed his fortunes. Once more retired to private life with but small means, he guarded his political principles rather like a religion than a hope. His hopes, his vivacity, his love of right all these he turned toward God.

His piety, as enlightened as profound, ranked him among the choicest spirits who then endeavored to reconcile the national faith of the past with the inexorable liberty of thought of the present. Like his collaborators in this work, he experienced only a mortal sadness under which he sank. True, his wife contributed no little to hasten his end by the intemperance of her zeal and the acrimony of her bigotry.

She had little heart and great pride, and made her God subserve her passions, as Dardennes made liberty subserve his malice.

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No sooner had she become a widow than she purified her salons. Thenceforth figured there only parishioners more orthodox than their bishops, French priests who denied Bossuet; consequently she believed that religion was saved in France. Louis de Camors, admitted to this choice circle by title both of relative and convert, found there the devotion of Louis XI and the charity of Catherine de Medicis; and he there lost very soon the little faith that remained to him.

He asked himself sadly whether there was no middle ground between Terror and Inquisition; whether in this world one must be a fanatic or nothing. He sought a middle course, possessing the force and cohesion of a party; but he sought in vain. It seemed to him that the whole world of politics and religion rushed to extremes; and that what was not extreme was inert and indifferent dragging out, day by day, an existence without faith and without principle.

Thus at least appeared to him those whom the sad changes of his life showed him as types of modern politics.

His younger aunt, Louise–Elizabeth, who enjoyed to the full all the pleasures of modern life, had already profited by her father's death to make a rich misalliance. She married the Baron Tonnelier, whose father, although the son of a miller, had shown ability and honesty enough to fill high positions under the First Empire.

The Baron Tonnelier had a large fortune, increasing every day by successful speculation. In his youth he had been a good horseman, a Voltairian, and a Liberal.

In time though he remained a Voltairian he renounced horsemanship, and Liberalism. Although he was a simple deputy, he had a twinge of democracy now and then; but after he was invested with the peerage, he felt sure from that moment that the human species had no more progress to make.

The French Revolution was ended; its giddiest height attained. No longer could any one walk, talk, write, or rise. That perplexed him. Had he been sincere, he would have avowed that he could not comprehend that there could be storms, or thunder–clouds in the heavens that the world was not perfectly happy and tranquil, while he himself was so. When his nephew was old enough to comprehend him, Baron Tonnelier was no longer peer of France; but being one who does himself no hurt and sometimes much good by a fall, he filled a high office under the new government. He endeavored to discharge its duties conscientiously, as he had those of the preceding reign.

He spoke with peculiar ease of suppressing this or that journal such an orator, such a book; of suppressing everything, in short, except himself. In his view, France had been in the wrong road since 1789, and he sought to lead her back from that fatal date.

Nevertheless, he never spoke of returning, in his proper person, to his grandfather's mill; which, to say the least, was inconsistent. Had Liberty been mother to this old gentleman, and had he met her in a clump of woods, he would have strangled her. We regret to add that he had the habit of terming "old duffers" such ministers as he suspected of liberal views, and especially such as were in favor of popular education. A more hurtful counsellor never approached a throne; but luckily, while near it in office, he was far from it in influence.

He was still a charming man, gallant and fresh more gallant, however, than fresh. Consequently his habits were not too good, and he haunted the greenroom of the opera. He had two daughters, recently married, before whom he repeated the most piquant witticisms of Voltaire, and the most improper stories of Tallemant de Reaux; and consequently both promised to afford the scandalmongers a series of racy anecdotes, as their mother had before them.

While Louis de Camors was learning rapidly, by the association and example of the collateral branches of his family, to defy equally all principles and all convictions, his terrible father finished the task.

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Worldling to the last extreme, depraved to his very core; past-master in the art of Parisian high life; an unbridled egotist, thinking himself superior to everything because he abused everything to himself; and, finally, flattering himself for despising all duties, which he had all his life prided himself on dispensing with such was his father. But for all this, he was the pride of his circle, with a pleasing presence and an indefinable charm of manner.

The father and son saw little of each other. M. de Camors was too proud to entangle his son in his own debaucheries; but the course of every-day life sometimes brought them together at meal-time. He would then listen with cool mockery to the enthusiastic or despondent speeches of the youth. He never deigned to argue seriously, but responded in a few bitter words, that fell like drops of sleet on the few sparks still glowing in the son's heart.

Becoming gradually discouraged, the latter lost all taste for work, and gave himself up, more and more, to the idle pleasures of his position. Abandoning himself wholly to these, he threw into them all the seductions of his person, all the generosity of his character but at the same time a sadness always gloomy, sometimes desperate.

The bitter malice he displayed, however, did not prevent his being loved by women and renowned among men. And the latter imitated him.

He aided materially in founding a charming school of youth without smiles. His air of ennui and lassitude, which with him at least had the excuse of a serious foundation, was servilely copied by the youth around him, who never knew any greater distress than an overloaded stomach, but whom it pleased, nevertheless, to appear faded in their flower and contemptuous of human nature.

We have seen Camors in this phase of his existence. But in reality nothing was more foreign to him than the mask of careless disdain that the young man assumed. Upon falling into the common ditch, he, perhaps, had one advantage over his fellows: he did not make his bed with base resignation; he tried persistently to raise himself from it by a violent struggle, only to be hurled upon it once more.

Strong souls do not sleep easily: indifference weighs them down.

They demand a mission a motive for action and faith.

Louis de Camors was yet to find his.

CHAPTER IV. A NEW ACTRESS IN A NOVEL ROLE

Louis de Camor's father had not I told him all in that last letter.

Instead of leaving him a fortune, he left him only embarrassments, for he was three fourths ruined. The disorder of his affairs had begun a long time before, and it was to repair them that he had married; a process that had not proved successful. A large inheritance on which he had relied as coming to his wife went elsewhere to endow a charity hospital. The Comte de Camors began a suit to recover it before the tribunal of the Council of State, but compromised it for an annuity of thirty thousand francs. This stopped at his death. He enjoyed, besides, several fat sinecures, which his name, his social rank, and his personal address secured him from some of the great insurance companies. But these resources did not survive him; he only rented the house he had occupied; and the young Comte de Camors found himself suddenly reduced to the provision of his mother's dowry a bare pittance to a man of his habits and rank.

His father had often assured him he could leave him nothing, so the son was accustomed to look forward to this situation. Therefore, when he realized it, he was neither surprised nor revolted by the improvident egotism of

which he was the victim. His reverence for his father continued unabated, and he did not read with the less respect or confidence the singular missive which figures at the beginning of this story. The moral theories which this letter advanced were not new to him. They were a part of the very atmosphere around him; he had often revolved them in his feverish brain; yet, never before had they appeared to him in the condensed form of a dogma, with the clear precision of a practical code; nor as now, with the authorization of such a voice and of such an example.

One incident gave powerful aid in confirming the impression of these last pages on his mind. Eight days after his father's death, he was reclining on the lounge in his smoking-room, his face dark as night and as his thoughts, when a servant entered and handed him a card. He took it listlessly, and read "Lescande, architect." Two red spots rose to his pale cheeks "I do not see any one," he said.

"So I told this gentleman," replied the servant, "but he insists in such an extraordinary manner "

"In an extraordinary manner?"

"Yes, sir; as if he had something very serious to communicate."

"Something serious aha! Then let him in." Camors rose and paced the chamber, a smile of bitter mockery wreathing his lips. "And must I now kill him?" he muttered between his teeth.

Lescande entered, and his first act dissipated the apprehension his conduct had caused. He rushed to the young Count and seized him by both hands, while Camors remarked that his face was troubled and his lips trembled. "Sit down and be calm," he said.

"My friend," said the other, after a pause, "I come late to see you, for which I crave pardon; but I am myself so miserable! See, I am in mourning!"

Camors felt a chill run to his very marrow. "In mourning! and why?" he asked, mechanically.

"Juliette is dead!" sobbed Lescande, and covered his eyes with his great hands.

"Great God!" cried Camors in a hollow voice. He listened a moment to Lescande's bitter sobs, then made a movement to take his hand, but dared not do it. "Great God! is it possible?" he repeated.

"It was so sudden!" sobbed Lescande, brokenly. "It seems like a dream a frightful dream! You know the last time you visited us she was not well. You remember I told you she had wept all day. Poor child! The morning of my return she was seized with congestion of the lungs of the brain I don't know! but she is dead! And so good! so gentle, so loving! to the last moment! Oh, my friend! my friend! A few moments before she died, she called me to her side. 'Oh, I love you so! I love you so!' she said. 'I never loved any but you you only! Pardon me! oh, pardon me!' Pardon her, poor child! My God, for what? for dying? for she never gave me a moment's grief before in this world. Oh, God of mercy!"

"I beseech you, my friend "

"Yes, yes, I do wrong. You also have your griefs.

But we are all selfish, you know. However, it was not of that that I came to speak. Tell me I know not whether a report I hear is correct. Pardon me if I mistake, for you know I never would dream of offending you; but they say that you have been left in very bad circumstances. If this is indeed so, my friend "

"It is not," interrupted Camors, abruptly.

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"Well, if it were I do not intend keeping my little house. Why should I, now? My little son can wait while I work for him. Then, after selling my house, I shall have two hundred thousand francs. Half of this is yours return it when you can!"

"I thank you, my unselfish friend," replied Camors, much moved, "but I need nothing. My affairs are disordered, it is true; but I shall still remain richer than you."

"Yes, but with your tastes "

"Well?"

"At all events, you know where to find me. I may count upon you may I not?"

"You may."

"Adieu, my friend! I can do you no good now; but I shall see you again shall I not?"

"Yes another time."

Lescande departed, and the young Count remained immovable, with his features convulsed and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

This moment decided his whole future.

Sometimes a man feels a sudden, unaccountable impulse to smother in himself all human love and sympathy.

In the presence of this unhappy man, so unworthily treated, so broken-spirited, so confiding, Camors if there be any truth in old spiritual laws should have seen himself guilty of an atrocious act, which should have condemned him to a remorse almost unbearable.

But if it were true that the human herd was but the product of material forces in nature, producing, haphazard, strong beings and weak ones lambs and lions he had played only the lion's part in destroying his companion. He said to himself, with his father's letter beneath his eyes, that this was the fact; and the reflection calmed him.

The more he thought, that day and the next, in depth of the retreat in which he had buried himself, the more was he persuaded that this doctrine was that very truth which he had sought, and which his father had bequeathed to him as the whole rule of his life. His cold and barren heart opened with a voluptuous pleasure under this new flame that filled and warmed it.

From this moment he possessed a faith a principle of action a plan of life all that he needed; and was no longer oppressed by doubts, agitation, and remorse. This doctrine, if not the most elevated, was at least above the level of the most of mankind. It satisfied his pride and justified his scorn.

To preserve his self-esteem, it was only necessary for him to preserve his honor, to do nothing low, as his father had said; and he determined never to do anything which, in his eyes, partook of that character. Moreover, were there not men he himself had met thoroughly steeped in materialism, who were yet regarded as the most honorable men of their day?

Perhaps he might have asked himself whether this incontestable fact might not, in part, have been attributed rather to the individual than to the doctrine; and whether men's beliefs did not always influence their actions. However that might have been, from the date of this crisis Louis de Camors made his father's will the rule of his life.

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To develop in all their strength the physical and intellectual gifts which he possessed; to make of himself the polished type of the civilization of the times; to charm women and control men; to revel in all the joys of intellect, of the senses, and of rank; to subdue as servile instincts all natural sentiments; to scorn, as chimeras and hypocrisies, all vulgar beliefs; to love nothing, fear nothing, respect nothing, save honor such, in fine, were the duties which he recognized, and the rights which he arrogated to himself.

It was with these redoubtable weapons, and strengthened by a keen intelligence and vigorous will, that he would return to the world his brow calm and grave, his eye caressing while unyielding, a smile upon his lips, as men had known him.

From this moment there was no cloud either upon his mind or upon his face, which wore the aspect of perpetual youth. He determined, above all, not to retrench, but to preserve, despite the narrowness of his present fortune, those habits of elegant luxury in which he still might indulge for several years, by the expenditure of his principal.

Both pride and policy gave him this council in an equal degree. He was not ignorant that the world is as cold toward the needy as it is warm to those not needing its countenance. Had he been thus ignorant, the attitude of his family, just after the death of his father, would have opened his eyes to the fact.

His aunt de la Roche-Jugan and his uncle Tonnelier manifested toward him the cold circumspection of people who suspected they were dealing with a ruined man. They had even, for greater security, left Paris, and neglected to notify the young Count in what retreat they had chosen to hide their grief. Nevertheless he was soon to learn it, for while he was busied in settling his father's affairs and organizing his own projects of fortune and ambition, one fine morning in August he met with a lively surprise.

He counted among his relatives one of the richest landed proprietors of France, General the Marquis de Campvallou d'Armignies, celebrated for his fearful outbursts in the Corps Legislatif. He had a voice of thunder, and when he rolled out, "Bah! Enough! Stop this order of the day!" the senate trembled, and the government commissioners bounced on their chairs. Yet he was the best fellow in the world, although he had killed two fellow-creatures in duels but then he had his reasons for that.

Camors knew him but slightly, paid him the necessary respect that politeness demanded toward a relative; met him sometimes at the club, over a game of whist, and that was all.

Two years before, the General had lost a nephew, the direct heir to his name and fortune. Consequently he was hunted by an eager pack of cousins and relatives; and Madame de la Roche-Jugan and the Baroness Tonnelier gave tongue in their foremost rank.

Camors was indifferent, and had, since that event, been particularly reserved in his intercourse with the General. Therefore he was considerably astonished when he received the following letter:

"DEAR KINSMAN:

"Your two aunts and their families are with me in the country. When it is agreeable to you to join them, I shall always feel happy to give a cordial greeting to the son of an old friend and companion-in-arms.

"I presented myself at your house before leaving Paris, but you were not visible.

"Believe me, I comprehend your grief: that you have experienced an irreparable loss, in which I sympathize with you most sincerely.

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"Receive, my dear kinsman, the best wishes of
GENERAL, THE MARQUIS DE CAMPVALLON D'ARMIGNES.

"CHATEAU DE CAMPVALLON, Voie de l'ouest.

"P.S. It is probable, my young cousin, that I may have something of
interest to communicate to you!"

This last sentence, and the exclamation mark that followed it, failed not to shake slightly the impassive calm that Camors was at that moment cultivating. He could not help seeing, as in a mirror, under the veil of the mysterious postscript, the reflection of seven hundred thousand francs of ground-rent which made the splendid income of the General. He recalled that his father, who had served some time in Africa, had been attached to the staff of M. de Campvallon as aide-de-camp, and that he had besides rendered him a great service of a different nature.

Notwithstanding that he felt the absurdity of these dreams, and wished to keep his heart free from them, he left the next day for Campvallon. After enjoying for seven or eight hours all the comforts and luxuries the Western line is reputed to afford its guests, Camors arrived in the evening at the station, where the General's carriage awaited him. The seignorial pile of the Chateau Campvallon soon appeared to him on a height, of which the sides were covered with magnificent woods, sloping down nearly to the plain, there spreading out widely.

It was almost the dinner-hour; and the young man, after arranging his toilet, immediately descended to the drawing-room, where his presence seemed to throw a wet blanket over the assembled circle. To make up for this, the General gave him the warmest welcome; only as he had a short memory or little imagination he found nothing better to say than to repeat the expressions of his letter, while squeezing his hand almost to the point of fracture.

"The son of my old friend and companion-in-arms," he cried; and the words rang out in such a sonorous voice they seemed to impress even himself for it was noticeable that after a remark, the General always seemed astonished, as if startled by the words that came out of his mouth and that seemed suddenly to expand the compass of his ideas and the depth of his sentiments.

To complete his portrait: he was of medium size, square, and stout; panting when he ascended stairs, or even walking on level ground; a face massive and broad as a mask, and reminding one of those fabled beings who blew fire from their nostrils; a huge moustache, white and grizzly; small gray eyes, always fixed, like those of a doll, but still terrible. He marched toward a man slowly, imposingly, with eyes fixed, as if beginning a duel to the death, and demanded of him imperatively the time of day!

Camors well knew this innocent weakness of his host, but, notwithstanding, was its dupe for one instant during the evening.

They had left the dining-table, and he was standing carelessly in the alcove of a window, holding a cup of coffee, when the General approached him from the extreme end of the room with a severe yet confidential expression, which seemed to preface an announcement of the greatest importance.

The postscript rose before him. He felt he was to have an immediate explanation.

The General approached, seized him by the buttonhole, and withdrawing him from the depth of the recess, looked into his eyes as if he wished to penetrate his very soul. Suddenly he spoke, in his thunderous voice. He said:

"What do you take in the morning, young man?"

"Tea, General."

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"Aha! Then give your orders to Pierre just as if you were at home;" and, turning on his heel and joining the ladies, he left Camors to digest his little comedy as he might.

Eight days passed. Twice the General made his guest the object of his formidable advance. The first time, having put him out of countenance, he contented himself with exclaiming:

"Well, young man!" and turned on his heel.

The next time he bore down upon Camors, he said not a word, and retired in silence.

Evidently the General had not the slightest recollection of the postscript. Camors tried to be contented, but would continually ask himself why he had come to Campvallou, in the midst of his family, of whom he was not overfond, and in the depths of the country, which he execrated. Luckily, the castle boasted a library well stocked with works on civil and international law, jurisprudence, and political economy. He took advantage of it; and, resuming the thread of those serious studies which had been broken off during his period of hopelessness, plunged into those recondite themes that pleased his active intelligence and his awakened ambition. Thus he waited patiently until politeness would permit him to bring to an explanation the former friend and companion-in-arms of his father. In the morning he rode on horseback; gave a lesson in fencing to his cousin Sigismund, the son of Madame de la Roche-Jugan; then shut himself up in the library until the evening, which he passed at bezique with the General. Meantime he viewed with the eye of a philosopher the strife of the covetous relatives who hovered around their rich prey.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan had invented an original way of making herself agreeable to the General, which was to persuade him he had disease of the heart. She continually felt his pulse with her plump hand, sometimes reassuring him, and at others inspiring him with a salutary terror, although he denied it.

"Good heavens! my dear cousin!" he would exclaim, "let me alone. I know I am mortal like everybody else. What of that? But I see your aim— it is to convert me! Ta-ta!"

She not only wished to convert him, but to marry him, and bury him besides.

She based her hopes in this respect chiefly on her son Sigismund; knowing that the General bitterly regretted having no one to inherit his name. He had but to marry Madame de la Roche-Jugan and adopt her son to banish this care. Without a single allusion to this fact, the Countess failed not to turn the thoughts of the General toward it with all the tact of an accomplished intrigante, with all the ardor of a mother, and with all the piety of an unctuous devotee.

Her sister, the Baroness Tonnelier, bitterly confessed her own disadvantage. She was not a widow. And she had no son. But she had two daughters, both of them graceful, very elegant and sparkling. One was Madame Bacquiere, the wife of a broker; the other, Madame Van-Cuyp, wife of a young Hollander, doing business at Paris.

Both interpreted life and marriage gayly; both floated from one year into another dancing, riding, hunting, coquetting, and singing recklessly the most risque songs of the minor theatres. Formerly, Camors, in his pensive mood, had taken an aversion to these little examples of modern feminine frivolity. Since he had changed his views of life he did them more justice. He said, calmly:

"They are pretty little animals that follow their instincts."

Mesdames Bacquiere and Van-Cuyp, instigated by their mother, applied themselves assiduously to making the General feel all the sacred joys that cluster round the domestic hearth. They enlivened his household, exercised

his horses, killed his game, and tortured his piano. They seemed to think that the General, once accustomed to their sweetness and animation, could not do without it, and that their society would become indispensable to him. They mingled, too, with their adroit manoeuvres, familiar and delicate attentions, likely to touch an old man. They sat on his knees like children, played gently with his moustache, and arranged in the latest style the military knot of his cravat.

Madame de la Roche–Jugan never ceased to deplore confidentially to the General the unfortunate education of her nieces; while the Baroness, on her side, lost no opportunity of holding up in bold relief the emptiness, impertinence, and sulkiness of young Count Sigismund.

In the midst of these honorable conflicts one person, who took no part in them, attracted the greatest share of Camors's interest; first for her beauty and afterward for her qualities. This was an orphan of excellent family, but very poor, of whom Madame de la Roche–Jugan and Madame Tonnelier had taken joint charge. Mademoiselle Charlotte de Luc d'Estrelles passed six months of each year with the Countess and six with the Baroness. She was twenty–five years of age, tall and blonde, with deep–set eyes under the shadow of sweeping, black lashes. Thick masses of hair framed her sad but splendid brow; and she was badly, or rather poorly dressed, never condescending to wear the cast–off clothes of her relatives, but preferring gowns of simplest material made by her own hands. These draperies gave her the appearance of an antique statue.

Her Tonnelier cousins nicknamed her "the goddess." They hated her; she despised them. The name they gave her, however, was marvellously suitable.

When she walked, you would have imagined she had descended from a pedestal; the pose of her head was like that of the Greek Venus; her delicate, dilating nostrils seemed carved by a cunning chisel from transparent ivory. She had a startled, wild air, such as one sees in pictures of huntress nymphs. She used a naturally fine voice with great effect; and had already cultivated, so far as she could, a taste for art.

She was naturally so taciturn one was compelled to guess her thoughts; and long since Camors had reflected as to what was passing in that self–centred soul. Inspired by his innate generosity, as well as his secret admiration, he took pleasure in heaping upon this poor cousin the attentions he might have paid a queen; but she always seemed as indifferent to them as she was to the opposite course of her involuntary benefactress. Her position at Campvallon was very odd. After Camors's arrival, she was more taciturn than ever; absorbed, estranged, as if meditating some deep design, she would suddenly raise the long lashes of her blue eyes, dart a rapid glance here and there, and finally fix it on Camors, who would feel himself tremble under it.

One afternoon, when he was seated in the library, he heard a gentle tap at the door, and Mademoiselle entered, looking very pale. Somewhat astonished, he rose and saluted her.

"I wish to speak with you, cousin," she said. The accent was pure and grave, but slightly touched with evident emotion. Camors stared at her, showed her to a divan, and took a chair facing her.

"You know very little of me, cousin," she continued, "but I am frank and courageous. I will come at once to the object that brings me here. Is it true that you are ruined?"

"Why do you ask, Mademoiselle?"

"You always have been very good to me you only. I am very grateful to you; and I also " She stopped, dropped her eyes, and a bright flush suffused her cheeks. Then she bent her head, smiling like one who has regained courage under difficulty. "Well, then," she resumed, "I am ready to devote my life to you. You will deem me very romantic, but I have wrought out of our united poverty a very charming picture, I believe. I am sure I should make an excellent wife for the husband I loved. If you must leave France, as they tell me you must, I will follow you I

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will be your brave and faithful helpmate. Pardon me, one word more, Monsieur de Camors. My proposition would be immodest if it concealed any afterthought. It conceals none. I am poor. I have but fifteen hundred francs' income. If you are richer than I, consider I have said nothing; for nothing in the world would then induce me to marry you!"

She paused; and with a manner of mingled yearning, candor, and anguish, fixed on him her large eyes full of fire.

There was a solemn pause. Between these strange natures, both high and noble, a terrible destiny seemed pending at this moment, and both felt it.

At length Camors responded in a grave, calm voice: "It is impossible, Mademoiselle, that you can appreciate the trial to which you expose me; but I have searched my heart, and I there find nothing worthy of you. Do me the justice to believe that my decision is based neither upon your fortune nor upon my own: but I am resolved never to marry." She sighed deeply, and rose. "Adieu, cousin," she said.

"I beg I pray you to remain one moment," cried the young man, reseating her with gentle force upon the sofa. He walked half across the room to repress his agitation; then leaning on a table near the young girl, said:

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, you are unhappy; are you not?"

"A little, perhaps," she answered.

"I do not mean at this moment, but always?"

"Always!"

"Aunt de la Roche–Jugan treats you harshly?"

"Undoubtedly; she dreads that I may entrap her son. Good heavens!"

"The little Tonneliers are jealous of you, and Uncle Tonnelier torments you?"

"Basely!" she said; and two tears swam on her eyelashes, then glistened like diamonds on her cheek.

"And what do you believe of the religion of our aunt?"

"What would you have me believe of religion that bestows no virtue restrains no vice?"

"Then you are a non–believer?"

"One may believe in God and the Gospel without believing in the religion of our aunt."

"But she will drive you into a convent. Why, then, do you not enter one?"

"I love life," the girl said.

He looked at her silently a moment, then continued "Yes, you love life the sunlight, the thoughts, the arts, the luxuries everything that is beautiful, like yourself. Then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, all these are in your hands; why do you not grasp them?"

"How?" she queried, surprised and somewhat startled.

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"If you have, as I believe you have, as much strength of soul as intelligence and beauty, you can escape at once and forever the miserable servitude fate has imposed upon you. Richly endowed as you are, you might become to-morrow a great artiste, independent, feted, rich, adored the mistress of Paris and of the world!"

"And yours also? No!" said this strange girl.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle Charlotte. I did not suspect you of any improper idea, when you offered to share my uncertain fortunes. Render me, I pray you, the same justice at this moment. My moral principles are very lax, it is true, but I am as proud as yourself. I never shall reach my aim by any subterfuge. No; strive to study art. I find you beautiful and seductive, but I am governed by sentiments superior to personal interests. I was profoundly touched by your sympathetic leaning toward me, and have sought to testify my gratitude by friendly counsel. Since, however, you now suspect me of striving to corrupt you for my own ends, I am silent, Mademoiselle, and permit you to depart."

"Pray proceed, Monsieur de Camors."

"You will then listen to me with confidence?"

"I will do so."

"Well, then, Mademoiselle, you have seen little of the world, but you have seen enough to judge and to be certain of the value of its esteem. The world! That is your family and mine: Monsieur and Madame Tonnelier, Monsieur and Madame de la Roche-Jugan, and the little Sigismund!

"Well, then, Mademoiselle Charlotte, the day that you become a great artiste, rich, triumphant, idolized, wealthy drinking, in deep draughts, all the joys of life that day Uncle Tonnelier will invoke outraged morals, our aunt will swoon with prudery in the arms of her old lovers, and Madame de la Roche-Jugan will groan and turn her yellow eyes to heaven! But what will all that matter to you?"

"Then, Monsieur, you advise me to lead an immoral life."

"By no manner of means. I only urge you, in defiance of public opinion, to become an actress, as the only sure road to independence, fame, and fortune. And besides, there is no law preventing an actress marrying and being 'honorable,' as the world understands the word. You have heard of more than one example of this."

"Without mother, family, or protector, it would be an extraordinary thing for me to do! I can not fail to see that sooner or later I should be a lost girl."

Camors remained silent. "Why do you not answer?" she asked.

"Heavens! Mademoiselle, because this is so delicate a subject, and our ideas are so different about it. I can not change mine; I must leave you yours. As for me, I am a very pagan."

"How? Are good and bad indifferent to you?"

"No; but to me it seems bad to fear the opinion of people one despises, to practise what one does not believe, and to yield before prejudices and phantoms of which one knows the unreality. It is bad to be a slave or a hypocrite, as are three fourths of the world. Evil is ugliness, ignorance, folly, and baseness. Good is beauty, talent, ability, and courage! That is all."

"And God?" the girl cried. He did not reply. She looked fixedly at him a moment without catching the eyes he kept turned from her. Her head drooped heavily; then raising it suddenly, she said: "There are sentiments men can not understand. In my bitter hours I have often dreamed of this free life you now advise; but I have always recoiled before one thought only one."

"And that?"

"Perhaps the sentiment is not peculiar to me perhaps it is excessive pride, but I have a great regard for myself my person is sacred to me. Should I come to believe in nothing, like you and I am far from that yet, thank God! I should even then remain honest and true faithful to one love, simply from pride. I should prefer," she added, in a voice deep and sustained, but somewhat strained, "I should prefer to desecrate an altar rather than myself!"

Saying these words, she rose, made a haughty movement of the head in sign of an adieu, and left the room.

CHAPTER V. THE COUNT LOSES A LADY AND FINDS A MISSION

Camors sat for some time plunged in thought.

He was astonished at the depths he had discovered in her character; he was displeased with himself without well knowing why; and, above all, he was much struck by his cousin.

However, as he had but a slight opinion of the sincerity of women, he persuaded himself that Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, when she came to offer him her heart and hand, nevertheless knew he was not altogether a despicable match for her. He said to himself that a few years back he might have been duped by her apparent sincerity, and congratulated himself on not having fallen into this attractive snare on not having listened to the first promptings of credulity and sincere emotion.

He might have spared himself these compliments. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, as he was soon to discover, had been in that perfectly frank, generous, and disinterested state of mind in which women sometimes are.

Only, would it happen to him to find her so in the future? That was doubtful, thanks to M. de Camors. It often happens that by despising men too much, we degrade them; in suspecting women too much, we lose them.

About an hour passed; there was another rap at the library door. Camors felt a slight palpitation and a secret wish that it should prove Mademoiselle Charlotte.

It was the General who entered. He advanced with measured stride, puffed like some sea-monster, and seized Camors by the lapel of his coat. Then he said, impressively:

"Well, young gentleman!"

"Well, General."

"What are you doing in here?"

"Oh, I am at work."

"At work? Um! Sit down there sit down, sit down!" He threw himself on the sofa where Mademoiselle had been, which rather changed the perspective for Camors.

"Well, well!" he repeated, after a long pause.

"But what then, General?"

"What then? The deuce! Why, have you not noticed that I have been for some days extraordinarily agitated?"

"No, General, I have not noticed it."

"You are not very observing! I am extraordinarily agitated enough to fatigue the eyes. So agitated, upon my word of honor, that there are moments when I am tempted to believe your aunt is right: that I have disease of the heart!"

"Bah, General! My aunt is dreaming; you have the pulse of an infant."

"You believe so, really? I do not fear death; but it is always annoying to think of it. But I am too much agitated it is necessary to put a stop to it. You understand?"

"Perfectly; but how can it concern me?"

"Concern you? You are about to hear. You are my cousin, are you not?"

"Truly, General, I have that honor."

"But very distant, eh? I have thirty–six cousins as near as you, and the devil! To speak plainly, I owe you nothing."

"And I have never demanded payment even of that, General."

"Ah, I know that! Well, you are my cousin, very far removed! But you are more than that. Your father saved my life in the Atlas. He has related it all to you No? Well, that does not astonish me; for he was no braggart, that father of yours; he was a man! Had he not quitted the army, a brilliant career was before him. People talk a great deal of Pelissier, of Canrobert, of MacMahon, and of others. I say nothing against them; they are good men doubtless at least I hear so; but your father would have eclipsed them all had he taken the trouble. But he didn't take the trouble!

"Well, for the story: We were crossing a gorge of the Atlas; we were in retreat; I had lost my command; I was following as a volunteer. It is useless to weary you with details; we were in retreat; a shower of stones and bullets poured upon us, as if from the moon. Our column was slightly disordered; I was in the rearguard whack! my horse was down, and I under him!

We were in a narrow gorge with sloping sides some fifteen feet high; five dirty guerillas slid down the sides and fell upon me and on the beast forty devils! I can see them now! Just here the gorge took a sudden turn, so no one could see my trouble; or no one wished to see it, which comes to the same thing.

"I have told you things were in much disorder; and I beg you to remember that with a dead horse and five live Arabs on top of me, I was not very comfortable. I was suffocating; in fact, I was devilish far from comfortable.

"Just then your father ran to my assistance, like the noble fellow he was! He drew me from under my horse; he fell upon the Arabs. When I was up, I aided him a little but that is nothing to the point I never shall forget him!"

There was a pause, when the General added:

"Let us understand each other, and speak plainly. Would it be very repugnant to your feelings to have seven hundred thousand francs a year, and to be called, after me, Marquis de Campvallou d'Armignés? Come, speak up, and give me an answer."

The young Count reddened slightly.

"My name is Camors," he said, gently.

"What! You would not wish me to adopt you? You refuse to become the heir of my name and of my fortune?"

"Yes, General."

"Do you not wish time to reflect upon it?"

"No, General. I am sincerely grateful for your goodness; your generous intentions toward me touch me deeply, but in a question of honor I never reflect or hesitate."

The General puffed fiercely, like a locomotive blowing off steam. Then he rose and took two or three turns up and down the gallery, shuffling his feet, his chest heaving. Then he returned and reseated himself.

"What are your plans for the future?" he asked, abruptly.

"I shall try, in the first place, General, to repair my fortune, which is much shattered. I am not so great a stranger to business as people suppose, and my father's connections and my own will give me a footing in some great financial or industrial enterprise. Once there, I shall succeed by force of will and steady work. Besides, I shall fit myself for public life, and aspire, when circumstances permit me, to become a deputy."

"Well, well, a man must do something. Idleness is the parent of all vices. See; like yourself, I am fond of the horse a noble animal. I approve of racing; it improves the breed of horses, and aids in mounting our cavalry efficiently. But sport should be an amusement, not a profession. Hem! so you aspire to become a deputy?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I can help you in that, at least. When you are ready I will send in my resignation, and recommend to my brave and faithful constituents that you take my place. Will that suit you?"

"Admirably, General; and I am truly grateful. But why should you resign?"

"Why? Well, to be useful to you in the first place; in the second, I am sick of it. I shall not be sorry to give personally a little lesson to the government, which I trust will profit by it. You know me I am no Jacobin; at first I thought that would succeed. But when I see what is going on!"

"What is going on, General?"

"When I see a Tonnellier a great dignitary! It makes me long for the pen of Tacitus, on my word. When I was retired in 'forty-eight, under a mean and cruel injustice they did me, I had not reached the age of exemption. I was still capable of good and loyal service; but probably I could have waited until an amendment. I found it at least in the confidence of my brave and faithful constituents. But, my young friend, one tires of everything. The Assemblies at the Luxembourg I mean the Palace of the Bourbons fatigue me. In short, whatever regret I may feel at parting from my honorable colleagues, and from my faithful constituents, I shall abdicate my functions whenever you are ready and willing to accept them. Have you not some property in this district?"

"Yes, General, a little property which belonged to my mother; a small manor, with a little land round it, called Reuilly."

"Reuilly! Not two steps from Des Rameures! Certainly certainly! Well, that is one foot in the stirrup."

"But then there is one difficulty; I am obliged to sell it."

"The devil! And why?"

"It is all that is left to me, and it only brings me eleven thousand francs a year; and to embark in business I need capital a beginning. I prefer not to borrow."

The General rose, and once more his military tramp shook the gallery. Then he threw himself back on the sofa.

"You must not sell that property! I owe you nothing, 'tis true, but I have an affection for you. You refuse to be my adopted son. Well, I regret this, and must have recourse to other projects to aid you. I warn you I shall try other projects. You must not sell your lands if you wish to become a deputy, for the country people especially those of Des Rameures will not hear of it. Meantime you will need funds. Permit me to offer you three hundred thousand francs. You may return them when you can, without interest, and if you never return them you will confer a very great favor upon me."

"But in truth, General "

"Come, come! Accept it as from a relative from a friend from your father's friend on any ground you please, so you accept. If not, you will wound me seriously."

Camors rose, took the General's hand, and pressing it with emotion, said, briefly:

"I accept, sir. I thank you!"

The General sprang up at these words like a furious lion, his moustache bristling, his nostrils dilating, his chest heaving. Staring at the young Count with real ferocity, he suddenly drew him to his breast and embraced him with great fervor. Then he strode to the door with his usual solemnity, and quickly brushing a tear from his cheek, left the room.

The General was a good man; but, like many good people, he had not been happy. You might smile at his oddities: you never could reproach him with vices.

He was a small man, but he had a great soul. Timid at heart, especially with women, he was delicate, passionate, and chaste. He had loved but little, and never had been loved at all. He declared that he had retired from all friendship with women, because of a wrong that he had suffered. At forty years of age he had married the daughter of a poor colonel who had been killed by the enemy. Not long after, his wife had deceived him with one of his aides-de-camp.

The treachery was revealed to him by a rival, who played on this occasion the infamous role of Iago. Campvallon laid aside his starred epaulettes, and in two successive duels, still remembered in Africa, killed on two successive days the guilty one and his betrayer. His wife died shortly after, and he was left more lonely than ever. He was not the man to console himself with venal love; a gross remark made him blush; the corps de ballet inspired him with terror. He did not dare to avow it, but the dream of his old age, with his fierce moustache and his grim countenance, was the devoted love of some young girl, at whose feet he might pour out, without shame, without distrust even, all the tenderness of his simple and heroic heart.

On the evening of the day which had been marked for Camors by these two interesting episodes, Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles did not come down to dinner, but sent word she had a headache. This message was received with a general murmur, and with some sharp remarks from Madame de la Roche–Jugan, which implied Mademoiselle was not in a position which justified her in having a headache. The dinner, however, was not less gay than usual, thanks to Mesdames Bacquiere and Van–Cuyp, and to their husbands, who had arrived from Paris to pass Sunday with them.

To celebrate this happy meeting, they drank very freely of champagne, talked slang, and imitated actors, causing much amusement to the servants. Returning to the drawing–room, these innocent young things thought it very funny to take their husbands' hats, put their feet in them, and, thus shod, to run a steeplechase across the room. Meantime Madame de la Roche–Jagan felt the General's pulse frequently, and found it variable.

Next morning at breakfast all the General's guests assembled, except Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, whose headache apparently was no better. They remarked also the absence of the General, who was the embodiment of politeness and punctuality. A sense of uneasiness was beginning to creep over all, when suddenly the door opened and the General appeared leading Mademoiselle d'Estrelles by the hand.

The young girl's eyes were red; her face was very pale. The General's face was scarlet. He advanced a few steps, like an actor about to address his audience; cast fierce glances on all sides of him, and cleared his throat with a sound that echoed like the bass notes of a grand piano. Then he spoke in a voice of thunder:

"My dear guests and friends, permit me to present to you the Marquise de Campvallou d'Armignés!"

An iceberg at the North Pole is not colder than was the General's salon at this announcement.

He held the young lady by the hand, and retaining his position in the centre of the room, launched out fierce glances. Then his eyes began to wander and roll convulsively in their sockets, as if he was himself astonished at the effect his announcement had produced.

Camors was the first to come to the rescue, and taking his hand, said: "Accept, my dear General, my congratulations. I am extremely happy, and rejoice at your good fortune; the more so, as I feel the lady is so well worthy of you." Then, bowing to Mademoiselle d'Estrelles with a grave grace, he pressed her hand, and turning away, was struck dumb at seeing Madame de la Roche–Jugan in the arms of the General. She passed from his into those of Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, who feared at first, from the violence of the caresses, that there was a secret design to strangle her.

"General," said Madame de la Roche–Jugan in a plaintive voice, "you remember I always recommended her to you. I always spoke well of her. She is my daughter my second child. Sigismund, embrace your sister! You permit it, General? Ah, we never know how much we love these children until we lose them! I always spoke well of her; did I not Ge General?" And here Madame de la Roche–Jugan burst into tears.

The General, who began to entertain a high opinion of the Countess's heart, declared that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles would find in him a friend and father. After which flattering assurance, Madame de la Roche–Jugan seated herself in a solitary corner, behind a curtain, whence they heard sobs and moans issue for a whole hour. She could not even breakfast; happiness had taken away her appetite.

The ice once broken, all tried to make themselves agreeable. The Tonneliers did not behave, however, with the same warmth as the tender Countess, and it was easy to see that Mesdames Bacquiere and VanCuyp could not picture to themselves, without envy, the shower of gold and diamonds about to fall into the lap of their cousin. Messrs. Bacquiere and Van–Cuyp were naturally the first sufferers, and their charming wives made them understand, at intervals during the day, that they thoroughly despised them. It was a bitter Sunday for those poor

fellows. The Tonnelier family also felt that little more was to be done there, and left the next morning with a very cold adieu.

The conduct of the Countess was more noble. She declared she would wait upon her dearly beloved Charlotte from the altar to the very threshold of the nuptial chamber; that she would arrange her trousseau, and that the marriage should take place from her house.

"Deuce take me, my dear Countess!" cried the General, "I must declare one thing you astonish me. I was unjust, cruelly unjust, toward you. I reproach myself, on my faith! I believed you worldly, interested, not open-hearted. But you are none of these; you are an excellent woman a heart of gold a noble soul! My dear friend, you have found the best way to convert me. I have always believed the religion of honor was sufficient for a man eh, Camors? But I am not an unbeliever, my dear Countess, and, on my sacred word, when I see a perfect creature like you, I desire to believe everything she believes, if only to be pleasant to her!"

When Camors, who was not quite so innocent, asked himself what was the secret of his aunt's politic conduct, but little effort was necessary to understand it.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had finally convinced herself that the General had an aneurism, flattered herself that the cares of matrimony would hasten the doom of her old friend. In any event, he was past seventy years of age. But Charlotte was young, and so also was Sigismund. Sigismund could become tender; if necessary, could quietly court the young Marquise until the day when he could marry her, with all her appurtenances, over the mausoleum of the General. It was for this that Madame de la Roche-Jugan, crushed for a moment under the unexpected blow that ruined her hopes, had modified her tactics and drawn her batteries, so to speak, under cover of the enemy. This was what she was contriving while she was weeping behind the curtain.

Camors's personal feelings at the announcement of this marriage were not of the most agreeable description. First, he was obliged to acknowledge that he had unjustly judged Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, and that at the moment of his accusing her of speculating on his small fortune, she was offering to sacrifice for him the annual seven hundred thousand francs of the General.

He felt his vanity injured, that he had not had the best part of this affair. Besides, he felt obliged to stifle from this moment the secret passion with which the beautiful and singular girl had inspired him. Wife or widow of the General, it was clear that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had forever escaped him. To seduce the wife of this good old man from whom he accepted such favors, or even to marry her, widowed and rich, after refusing her when poor, were equal unworthiness and baseness that honor forbade in the same degree and with the same rigor as if this honor, which he made the only law of his life, were not a mockery and an empty word.

Camors, however, did not fail to comprehend the position in this light, and he resigned himself to it.

During the four or five days he remained at Campvallou his conduct was perfect. The delicate and reserved attentions with which he surrounded Mademoiselle d'Estrelles were tinged with a melancholy that showed her at the same time his gratitude, his respect, and his regrets.

M. de Campvallou had not less reason to congratulate himself on the conduct of the young Count. He entered into the folly of his host with affectionate grace. He spoke to him little of the beauty of his fiancée: much of her high moral qualities; and let him see his most flattering confidence in the future of this union.

On the eve of his departure Camors was summoned into the General's study. Handing his young relative a check for three hundred thousand francs, the General said:

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur de Camors, v1

"My dear young friend, I ought to tell you, for the peace of your conscience, that I have informed Mademoiselle d'Estrelles of this little service I render you. She has a great deal of love and affection for you, my dear young friend; be sure of that.

"She therefore received my communication with sincere pleasure. I also informed her that I did not intend taking any receipt for this sum, and that no reclamation of it should be made at any time, on any account.

"Now, my dear Camors, do me one favor. To tell you my inmost thought, I shall be most happy to see you carry into execution your project of laudable ambition. My own new position, my age, my tastes, and those I perceive in the Marquise, claim all my leisure all my liberty of action. Consequently, I desire as soon as possible to present you to my generous and faithful constituents, as well for the Corps Legislatif as for the General Council. You had better make your preliminary arrangements as soon as possible. Why should you defer it? You are very well cultivated very capable. Well, let us go ahead let us begin at once. What do you say?"

"I should prefer, General, to be more mature; but it would be both folly and ingratitude in me not to accede to your kind wish. What shall I do first?"

"Well, my young friend, instead of leaving tomorrow for Paris, you must go to your estate at Reully: go there and conquer Des Rameures."

"And who are the Des Rameures, General?"

"You do not know the Des Rameures? The deuce! no; you can not know them! That is unfortunate, too.

Des Rameures is a clever fellow, a very clever fellow, and all-powerful in his neighborhood. He is an original, as you will see; and with him lives his niece, a charming woman. I tell you, my boy, you must please them, for Des Rameures is the master of the county. He protects me, or else, upon my honor, I should be stopped on the road!"

"But, General, what shall I do to please this Des Rameures?"

"You will see him. He is, as I tell you, a great oddity. He has not been in Paris since 1825; he has a horror of Paris and Parisians. Very well, it only needs a little tact to flatter his views on that point. We always need a little tact in this world, young man."

"But his niece, General?"

"Ah, the deuce! You must please the niece also. He adores her, and she manages him completely, although he grumbles a little sometimes."

"And what sort of woman is she?"

"Oh, a respectable woman a perfectly respectable woman. A widow; somewhat a devotee, but very well informed. A woman of great merit."

"But what course must I take to please this lady?"

"What course? By my faith, young man, you ask a great many questions. I never yet learned to please a woman. I am green as a goose with them always. It is a thing I can not understand; but as for you, my young comrade, you have little need to be instructed in that matter. You can't fail to please her; you have only to make yourself agreeable. But you will know how to do it you will conduct yourself like an angel, I am sure."

"Captive Des Rameures and his niece this is your advice!"

Early next morning Camors left the Chateau de Campvallou, armed with these imperfect instructions; and, further, with a letter from the General to Des Rameures.

He went in a hired carriage to his own domain of Reully, which lay ten leagues off. While making this transit he reflected that the path of ambition was not one of roses; and that it was hard for him, at the outset of his enterprise, to be compelled to encounter two faces likely to be as disquieting as those of Des Rameures and his niece.

CHAPTER VI. THE OLD DOMAIN OF REULLY

The domain of Reully consisted of two farms and of a house of some pretension, inhabited formerly by the maternal family of M. de Camors. He had never before seen this property when he reached it on the evening of a beautiful summer day. A long and gloomy avenue of elms, interlacing their thick branches, led to the dwelling-house, which was quite unequal to the imposing approach to it; for it was but an inferior construction of the past century, ornamented simply by a gable and a bull's-eye, but flanked by a lordly dovecote.

It derived a certain air of dignity from two small terraces, one above the other, in front of it, while the triple flight of steps was supported by balusters of granite. Two animals, which had once, perhaps, resembled lions, were placed one upon each side of the balustrade at the platform of the highest terrace; and they had been staring there for more than a hundred and fifty years. Behind the house stretched the garden; and in its midst, mounted on a stone arch, stood a dismal sun-dial with hearts and spades painted between its figures; while the trees around it were trimmed into the shapes of confessionals and chess-pawns. To the right, a labyrinth of young trees, similarly clipped in the fashion of the time, led by a thousand devious turns to a mysterious valley, where one heard continually a low, sad murmur. This proceeded from a nymph in terra-cotta, from whose urn dripped, day and night, a thin rill of water into a small fishpond, bordered by grand old poplars, whose shadows threw upon its surface, even at mid-day, the blackness of Acheron.

Camors's first reflection at viewing this prospect was an exceedingly painful one; and the second was even more so.

At another time he would doubtless have taken an interest in searching through these souvenirs of the past for traces of an infant nurtured there, who had a mother, and who had perhaps loved these old relics. But his system did not admit of sentiment, so he crushed the ideas that crowded to his mind, and, after a rapid glance around him, called for his dinner.

The old steward and his wife who for thirty years had been the sole inhabitants of Reully had been informed of his coming. They had spent the day in cleaning and airing the house; an operation which added to the discomfort they sought to remove, and irritated the old residents of the walls, while it disturbed the sleep of hoary spiders in their dusty webs. A mixed odor of the cellar, of the sepulchre, and of an old coach, struck Camors when he penetrated into the principal room, where his dinner was to be served.

Taking up one or two flickering candles, the like of which he had never seen before, Camors proceeded to inspect the quaint portraits of his ancestors, who seemed to stare at him in great surprise from their cracked canvases. They were a dilapidated set of old nobles, one having lost a nose, another an arm, others again sections of their faces. One of them a chevalier of St. Louis had received a bayonet thrust through the centre in the riotous times of the Revolution; but he still smiled at Camors, and sniffed at a flower, despite the daylight shining through him.

Camors finished his inspection, thinking to himself they were a highly respectable set of ancestors, but not worth

fifteen francs apiece. The housekeeper had passed half the previous night in slaughtering various dwellers in the poultry-yard; and the results of the sacrifice now successively appeared, swimming in butter. Happily, however, the fatherly kindness of the General had despatched a hamper of provisions from Campvallon, and a few slices of pate, accompanied by sundry glasses of Chateau-Yquem helped the Count to combat the dreary sadness with which his change of residence, solitude, the night, and the smoke of his candles, all conspired to oppress him.

Regaining his usual good spirits, which had deserted him for a moment, he tried to draw out the old steward, who was waiting on him. He strove to glean from him some information of the Des Rameures; but the old servant, like every Norman peasant, held it as a tenet of faith that he who gave a plain answer to any question was a dishonored man. With all possible respect he let Camors understand plainly that he was not to be deceived by his affected ignorance into any belief that M. le Comte did not know a great deal better than he who and what M. des Rameures was where he lived, and what he did; that M. le Comte was his master, and as such was entitled to his respect, but that he was nevertheless a Parisian, and as M. des Rameures said all Parisians were jesters.

Camors, who had taken an oath never to get angry, kept it now; drew from the General's old cognac a fresh supply of patience, lighted a cigar, and left the room.

For a few moments he leaned over the balustrade of the terrace and looked around. The night, clear and beautiful, enveloped in its shadowy veil the widestretching fields, and a solemn stillness, strange to Parisian ears, reigned around him, broken only at intervals by the distant bay of a hound, rising suddenly, and dying into peace again. His eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, Camors descended the terrace stairs and passed into the old avenue, which was darker and more solemn than a cathedral-aisle at midnight, and thence into an open road into which it led by chance.

Strictly speaking, Camors had never, until now, been out of Paris; for wherever he had previously gone, he had carried its bustle, worldly and artificial life, play, and the races with him; and the watering-places and the seaside had never shown him true country, or provincial life. It gave him a sensation for the first time; but the sensation was an odious one.

As he advanced up this silent road, without houses or lights, it seemed to him he was wandering amid the desolation of some lunar region. This part of Normandy recalled to him the least cultivated parts of Brittany. It was rustic and savage, with its dense shrubbery, tufted grass, dark valleys, and rough roads.

Some dreamers love this sweet but severe nature, even at night; they love the very things that grated most upon the pampered senses of Camors, who strode on in deep disgust, flattering himself, however, that he should soon reach the Boulevard de Madeleine. But he found, instead, peasants' huts scattered along the side of the road, their low, mossy roofs seeming to spring from the rich soil like an enormous fungus growth. Two or three of the dwellers in these huts were taking the fresh evening air on their thresholds, and Camors could distinguish through the gloom their heavy figures and limbs, roughened by coarse toil in the fields, as they stood mute, motionless, and ruminating in the darkness like tired beasts.

Camors, like all men possessed by a dominant idea, had, ever since he adopted the religion of his father as his rule of life, taken the pains to analyze every impression and every thought. He now said to himself, that between these countrymen and a refined man like himself there was doubtless a greater difference than between them and their beasts of burden; and this reflection was as balm to the scornful aristocracy that was the cornerstone of his theory. Wandering on to an eminence, his discouraged eye swept but a fresh horizon of apple-trees and heads of barley, and he was about to turn back when a strange sound suddenly arrested his steps. It was a concert of voice and instruments, which in this lost solitude seemed to him like a dream, or a miracle. The music was good—even excellent. He recognized a prelude of Bach, arranged by Gounod. Robinson Crusoe, on discovering the footprint in the sand, was not more astonished than Camors at finding in this desert so lively a symptom of civilization.

Filled with curiosity, and led by the melody he heard, he descended cautiously the little hill, like a king's son in search of the enchanted princess. The palace he found in the middle of the path, in the shape of the high back wall of a dwelling, fronting on another road. One of the upper windows on this side, however, was open; a bright light streamed from it, and thence he doubted not the sweet sounds came.

To an accompaniment of the piano and stringed instruments rose a fresh, flexible woman's voice, chanting the mystic words of the master with such expression and power as would have given even him delight. Camors, himself a musician, was capable of appreciating the masterly execution of the piece; and was so much struck by it that he felt an irresistible desire to see the performers, especially the singer. With this impulse he climbed the little hedge bordering the road, placed himself on the top, and found himself several feet above the level of the lighted window. He did not hesitate to use his skill as a gymnast to raise himself to one of the branches of an old oak stretching across the lawn; but during the ascent he could not disguise from himself that his was scarcely a dignified position for the future deputy of the district. He almost laughed aloud at the idea of being surprised in this position by the terrible Des Rameures, or his niece.

He established himself on a large, leafy branch, directly in front of the interesting window; and notwithstanding that he was at a respectful distance, his glance could readily penetrate into the chamber where the concert was taking place. A dozen persons, as he judged, were there assembled; several women, of different ages, were seated at a table working; a young man appeared to be drawing; while other persons lounged on comfortable seats around the room. Around the piano was a group which chiefly attracted the attention of the young Count. At the instrument was seated a grave young girl of about twelve years; immediately behind her stood an old man, remarkable for his great height, his head bald, with a crown of white hair, and his bushy black eyebrows. He played the violin with priestly dignity. Seated near him was a man of about fifty, in the dress of an ecclesiastic, and wearing a huge pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, who played the violincello with great apparent gusto.

Between them stood the singer. She was a pale brunette, slight and graceful, and apparently not more than twenty-five years of age. The somewhat severe oval of her face was relieved by a pair of bright black eyes that seemed to grow larger as she sang. One hand rested gently on the shoulder of the girl at the piano, and with this she seemed to keep time, pressing gently on the shoulder of the performer to stimulate her zeal. And that hand was delicious!

A hymn by Palestrina had succeeded the Bach prelude. It was a quartette, to which two new voices lent their aid. The old priest laid aside his violoncello, stood up, took off his spectacles, and his deep bass completed the full measure of the melody.

After the quartette followed a few moments of general conversation, during which after embracing the child pianist, who immediately left the room the songstress walked to the window. She leaned out as if to breathe the fresh air, and her profile was sharply relieved against the bright light behind her, in which the others formed a group around the priest, who once more donned his spectacles, and drew from his pocket a paper that appeared to be a manuscript.

The lady leaned from the window, gently fanning herself, as she looked now at the sky, now at the dark landscape. Camors imagined he could distinguish her gentle breathing above the sound of the fan; and leaning eagerly forward for a better view, he caused the leaves to rustle slightly. She started at the sound, then remained immovable, and the fixed position of her head showed that her gaze was fastened upon the oak in which he was concealed.

He felt the awkwardness of his position, but could not judge whether or not he was visible to her; but, under the danger of her fixed regard, he passed the most painful moments of his life.

She turned into the room and said, in a calm voice, a few words which brought three or four of her friends to the window; and among them Camors recognized the old man with the violin.

The moment was a trying one. He could do nothing but lie still in his leafy retreat silent and immovable as a statue. The conduct of those at the window went far to reassure him, for their eyes wandered over the gloom with evident uncertainty, convincing him that his presence was only suspected, not discovered. But they exchanged animated observations, to which the hidden Count lent an attentive ear. Suddenly a strong voice which he recognized as belonging to him of the violin—rose over them all in the pleasing order: "Loose the dog!"

This was sufficient for Camors. He was not a coward; he would not have budged an inch before an enraged tiger; but he would have travelled a hundred miles on foot to avoid the shadow of ridicule. Profiting by the warning and a moment when he seemed unobserved, he slid from the tree, jumped into the next field, and entered the wood at a point somewhat farther down than the spot where he had scaled the hedge. This done, he resumed his walk with the assured tread of a man who had a right to be there. He had gone but a few steps, when he heard behind him the wild barking of the dog, which proved his retreat had been opportune.

Some of the peasants he had noticed as he passed before, were still standing at their doors. Stopping before one of them he asked:

"My friend, to whom does that large house below there, facing the other road, belong? and whence comes that music?"

"You probably know that as well as I," replied the man, stolidly.

"Had I known, I should hardly have asked you," said Camors.

The peasant did not deign further reply. His wife stood near him; and Camors had remarked that in all classes of society women have more wit and goodhumor than their husbands. Therefore he turned to her and said:

"You see, my good woman, I am a stranger here. To whom does that house belong? Probably to Monsieur des Rameures?"

"No, no," replied the woman, "Monsieur des Rameures lives much farther on."

"Ah! Then who lives here?"

"Why, Monsieur de Teclé, of course!"

"Ah, Monsieur de Teclé! But tell me, he does not live alone? There is a lady who sings his wife? his sister? Who is she?"

"Ah, that is his daughter—in-law, Madame de Teclé Madame Elise, who "

"Ah! thank you, thank you, my good woman! You have children? Buy them sabots with this," and dropping a gold piece in the lap of the obliging peasant, Camors walked rapidly away. Returning home the road seemed less gloomy and far shorter than when he came. As he strode on, humming the Bach prelude, the moon rose, the country looked more beautiful, and, in short, when he perceived, at the end of its gloomy avenue, his chateau bathed in the white light, he found the spectacle rather enjoyable than otherwise. And when he had once more ensconced himself in the maternal domicile, and inhaled the odor of damp paper and mouldy trees that constituted its atmosphere, he found great consolation in the reflection that there existed not very far away from him a young woman who possessed a charming face, a delicious voice, and a pretty name.

Next morning, after plunging into a cold bath, to the profound astonishment of the old steward and his wife, the Comte de Camors went to inspect his farms. He found the buildings very similar in construction to the dams of beavers, though far less comfortable; but he was amazed to hear his farmers arguing, in their patois, on the various modes of culture and crops, like men who were no strangers to all modern improvements in agriculture. The name of Des Rameures frequently occurred in the conversation as confirmation of their own theories, or experiments. M. des Rameures gave preference to this manure, to this machine for winnowing; this breed of animals was introduced by him. M. des Rameures did this, M. des Rameures did that, and the farmers did like him, and found it to their advantage. Camors found the General had not exaggerated the local importance of this personage, and that it was most essential to conciliate him. Resolving therefore to call on him during the day, he went to breakfast.

This duty toward himself fulfilled, the young Count lounged on the terrace, as he had the evening before, and smoked his cigar. Though it was near midday, it was doubtful to him whether the solitude and silence appeared less complete and oppressive than on the preceding night. A hushed cackling of fowls, the drowsy hum of bees, and the muffled chime of a distant bell these were all the sounds to be heard.

Camors lounged on the terrace, dreaming of his club, of the noisy Paris crowd, of the rumbling omnibuses, of the playbill of the little kiosk, of the scent of heated asphalt and the memory of the least of these enchantments brought infinite peace to his soul. The inhabitant of Paris has one great blessing, which he does not take into account until he suffers from its loss one great half of his existence is filled up without the least trouble to himself. The all-potent vitality which ceaselessly envelops him takes away from him in a vast degree the exertion of amusing himself. The roar of the city, rising like a great bass around him, fills up the gaps in his thoughts, and never leaves that disagreeable sensation a void.

There is no Parisian who is not happy in the belief that he makes all the noise he hears, writes all the books he reads, edits all the journals on which he breakfasts, writes all the vaudevilles on which he sups, and invents all the 'bon mots' he repeats.

But this flattering allusion vanishes the moment chance takes him a mile away from the Rue Vivienne. The proof confounds him, for he is bored terribly, and becomes sick of himself. Perhaps his secret soul, weakened and unnerved, may even be assailed by the suspicion that he is a feeble human creature after all! But no! He returns to Paris; the collective electricity again inspires him; he rebounds; he recovers; he is busy, keen to discern, active, and recognizes once more, to his intense satisfaction, that he is after all one of the elect of God's creatures momentarily degraded, it may be, by contact with the inferior beings who people the departments.

Camors had within himself more resources than most men to conquer the blue-devils; but in these early hours of his experience in country life, deprived of his club, his horses, and his cook, banished from all his old haunts and habits, he began to feel terribly the weight of time. He, therefore, experienced a delicious sensation when suddenly he heard that regular beat of hoofs upon the road which to his trained ear announced the approach of several riding-horses. The next moment he saw advancing up his shaded avenue two ladies on horseback, followed by a groom with a black cockade.

Though quite amazed at this charming spectacle, Camors remembered his duty as a gentleman and descended the steps of the terrace. But the two ladies, at sight of him, appeared as surprised as himself, suddenly drew rein and conferred hastily. Then, recovering, they continued their way, traversed the lower court below the terraces, and disappeared in the direction of the lake.

As they passed the lower balustrade Camors bowed low, and they returned his salutation by a slight inclination; but he was quite sure, in spite of the veils that floated from their riding-hats, that he recognized the black-eyed singer and the young pianist. After a moment he called to his old steward

"Monsieur Leonard," he said, "is this a public way?"

"It certainly is not a public way, Monsieur le Comte," replied Leonard.

"Then what do these ladies mean by using this road?"

"Bless me, Monsieur le Comte, it is so long since any of the owners have been at Reully ! These ladies mean no harm by passing through your woods; and sometimes they even stop at the chateau while my wife gives them fresh milk. Shall I tell them that this displeases Monsieur le Comte?"

"My good Leonard, why the deuce do you suppose it displeases me? I only asked for information. And now who are the ladies?"

"Oh! Monsieur, they are quite respectable ladies; Madame de Tecle, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Marie."

"So? And the husband of Madame, Monsieur de Tecle, never rides out with them?"

"Heavens! no, Monsieur. He never rides with them." And the old steward smiled a dry smile. "He has been among the dead men for a long time, as Monsieur le Comte well knows."

"Granting that I know it, Monsieur Leonard, I wish it understood these ladies are not to be interfered with. You comprehend?"

Leonard seemed pleased that he was not to be the bearer of any disagreeable message; and Camors, suddenly conceiving that his stay at Reully might be prolonged for some time, reentered the chateau and examined the different rooms, arranging with the steward the best plan of making the house habitable. The little town of I , but two leagues distant, afforded all the means, and M. Leonard proposed going there at once to confer with the architect.

CHAPTER VII. ELISE DE TECLE

Meantime Camors directed his steps toward the residence of M. des Rameures, of which he at last obtained correct information. He took the same road as the preceding evening, passed the monastic-looking building that held Madame de Tecle, glanced at the old oak that had served him for an observatory, and about a mile farther on he discovered the small house with towers that he sought.

It could only be compared to those imaginary edifices of which we have all read in childhood's happy days in taking text, under an attractive picture: "The castle of M. de Valmont was agreeably situated at the summit of a pretty hill." It had a really picturesque surrounding of fields sloping away, green as emerald, dotted here and there with great bouquets of trees, or cut by walks adorned with huge roses or white bridges thrown over rivulets. Cattle and sheep were resting here and there, which might have figured at the Opera Comique, so shining were the skins of the cows and so white the wool of the sheep. Camors swung open the gate, took the first road he saw, and reached the top of the hill amid trees and flowers. An old servant slept on a bench before the door, smiling in his dreams.

Camors waked him, inquired for the master of the house, and was ushered into a vestibule. Thence he entered a charming apartment, where a young lady in a short skirt and round hat was arranging bouquets in Chinese vases.

She turned at the noise of the opening door, and Camors saw Madame de Tecle!

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As he saluted her with an air of astonishment and doubt, she looked fixedly at him with her large eyes. He spoke first, with more of hesitation than usual.

"Pardon me, Madame, but I inquired for Monsieur des Rameures."

"He is at the farm, but will soon return. Be kind enough to wait."

She pointed to a chair, and seated herself, pushing away with her foot the branches that strewed the floor.

"But, Madame, in the absence of Monsieur des Rameures may I have the honor of speaking with his niece?"

The shadow of a smile flitted over Madame de Tecle's brown but charming face. "His niece?" she said: "I am his niece."

"You I Pardon me, Madame, but I thought they said I expected to find an elderly a person that is, a respectable" he hesitated, then added simply "and I find I am in error."

Madame de Tecle seemed completely unmoved by this compliment.

"Will you be kind enough, Monsieur," she said, "to let me know whom I have the honor of receiving?"

"I am Monsieur de Camors."

"Ah! Then I have excuses also to make. It was probably you whom we saw this morning. We have been very rude my daughter and I but we were ignorant of your arrival; and Reuilly has been so long deserted."

"I sincerely hope, Madame, that your daughter and yourself will make no change in your rides."

Madame de Tecle replied by a movement of the hand that implied certainly she appreciated the offer, and certainly she should not accept it. Then there was a pause long enough to embarrass Camors, during which his eye fell upon the piano, and his lips almost formed the original remark "You are a musician, Madame." Suddenly recollecting his tree, however, he feared to betray himself by the allusion, and was silent.

"You come from Paris, Monsieur de Camors?" Madame de Tecle at length asked.

"No, Madame, I have been passing several weeks with my kinsman, General de Campvallon, who has also the honor, I believe, to be a friend of yours; and who has requested me to call upon you."

"We are delighted that you have done so; and what an excellent man the General is!"

"Excellent indeed, Madame." There was another pause.

"If you do not object to a short walk in the sun," said Madame de Tecle at length, "let us walk to meet my uncle. We are almost sure to meet him." Camors bowed. Madame de Tecle rose and rang the bell: "Ask Mademoiselle Marie," she said to the servant, "to be kind enough to put on her hat and join us."

A moment after, Mademoiselle Marie entered, cast on the stranger the steady, frank look of an inquisitive child, bowed slightly to him, and they all left the room by a door opening on the lawn.

Madame de Tecle, while responding courteously to the graceful speeches of Camors, walked on with a light and rapid step, her fairy-like little shoes leaving their impression on the smooth fine sand of the path.

She walked with indescribable, unconscious grace; with that supple, elastic undulation which would have been coquettish had it not been undeniably natural. Reaching the wall that enclosed the right side of the park, she opened a wicket that led into a narrow path through a large field of ripe corn. She passed into this path, followed in single file by Mademoiselle Marie and by Camors. Until now the child had been very quiet, but the rich golden corn-tassels, entangled with bright daisies, red poppies, and hollyhocks, and the humming concert of myriads of flies—blue, yellow, and reddishbrown which sported amid the sweets, excited her beyond self-control. Stopping here and there to pluck a flower, she would turn and cry, "Pardon, Monsieur;" until, at length, on an apple-tree growing near the path she descried on a low branch a green apple, no larger than her finger. This temptation proved irresistible, and with one spring into the midst of the corn, she essayed to reach the prize, if Providence would permit. Madame de Tecle, however, would not permit. She seemed much displeased, and said, sharply:

"Marie, my child! In the midst of the corn! Are you crazy!"

The child returned promptly to the path, but unable to conquer her wish for the apple, turned an imploring eye to Camors and said, softly: "Pardon, Monsieur, but that apple would make my bouquet complete."

Camors had only to reach up, stretch out his hand, and detach the branch from the tree.

"A thousand thanks!" cried the child, and adding this crowning glory to her bouquet, she placed the whole inside the ribbon around her hat and walked on with an air of proud satisfaction.

As they approached the fence running across the end of the field, Madame de Tecle suddenly said: "My uncle, Monsieur;" and Camors, raising his head, saw a very tall man looking at them over the fence and shading his eyes with his hand. His robust limbs were clad in gaiters of yellow leather with steel buttons, and he wore a loose coat of maroon velvet and a soft felt hat. Camors immediately recognized the white hair and heavy black eyebrows as the same he had seen bending over the violin the night before.

"Uncle," said Madame de Tecle, introducing the young Count by a wave of the hand: "This is Monsieur de Camors."

"Monsieur de Camors," repeated the old man, in a deep and sonorous voice, "you are most welcome;" and opening the gate he gave his guest a soft, brown hand, as he continued: "I knew your mother intimately, and am charmed to have her son under my roof. Your mother was a most amiable person, Monsieur, and certainly merited " The old man hesitated, and finished his sentence by a sonorous "Hem!" that resounded and rumbled in his chest as if in the vault of a church.

Then he took the letter Camors handed to him, held it a long distance from his eyes, and began reading it. The General had told the Count it would be impolite to break suddenly to M. des Rameures the plan they had concocted. The latter, therefore, found the note only a very warm introduction of Camors. The postscript gave him the announcement of the marriage.

"The devil!" he cried. "Did you know this, Elise? Campvallou is to be married!"

All women, widows, matrons, or maids, are deeply interested in matters pertaining to marriage.

"What, uncle! The General! Can it be? Are you sure?"

"Um rather. He writes the news himself. Do you know the lady, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles is my cousin," Camors replied.

"Ah! That is right; and she is of a certain age?"

"She is about twenty-five."

M. des Rameures received this intelligence with one of the resonant coughs peculiar to him.

"May I ask, without indiscretion, whether she is endowed with a pleasing person?"

"She is exceedingly beautiful," was the reply.

"Hem! So much the better. It seems to me the General is a little old for her: but every one is the best judge of his own affairs: Hem! the best judge of his own affairs. Elise, my dear, whenever you are ready we will follow you. Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte, for receiving you in this rustic attire, but I am a laborer. Agricola a mere herdsman 'custos gregis', as the poet says. Walk before me, Monsieur le Comte, I beg you. Marie, child, respect my corn!

"And can we hope, Monsieur de Camors, that you have the happy idea of quitting the great Babylon to install yourself among your rural possessions? It will be a good example, Monsieur an excellent example! For unhappily today more than ever we can say with the poet:

'Non ullus aratro

Dignus honos; squalent abductis arva colonis,
Et et '

"And, by gracious! I've forgotten the rest poor memory! Ah, young sir, never grow old—never grow old!"

'Et curvae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem,"'

said Camors, continuing the broken quotation.

"Ah! you quote Virgil. You read the classics. I am charmed, really charmed. That is not the characteristic of our rising generation, for modern youth has an idea it is bad taste to quote the ancients. But that is not my idea, young sir not in the least. Our fathers quoted freely because they were familiar with them. And Virgil is my poet. Not that I approve of all his theories of cultivation. With all the respect I accord him, there is a great deal to be said on that point; and his plan of breeding in particular will never do never do! Still, he is delicious, eh? Very well, Monsieur Camors, now you see my little domain 'mea paupera regna' the retreat of the sage. Here I live, and live happily, like an old shepherd in the golden age loved by my neighbors, which is not easy; and venerating the gods, which is perhaps easier. Ah, young sir, as you read Virgil, you will excuse me once more. It was for me he wrote:

'Fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota,
Et fontes sacros frigus captabis opacum.'

And this as well:

'Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestes,
Panaque, Silvanumque senem!'"

"Nymphasque sorores!" finished Camors, smiling and moving his head slightly in the direction of Madame de Tecle and her daughter, who preceded them.

"Quite to the point. That is pure truth!" cried M. des Rameures, gayly. "Did you hear that, niece?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And did you understand it, niece?"

"No, uncle."

"I do not believe you, my dear! I do not believe you!" The old man laughed heartily. "Do not believe her, Monsieur de Camors; women have the faculty of understanding compliments in every language."

This conversation brought them to the chateau, where they sat down on a bench before the drawing-room windows to enjoy the view.

Camors praised judiciously the well-kept park, accepted an invitation to dinner the next week, and then discreetly retired, flattering himself that his introduction had made a favorable impression upon M. des Rameures, but regretting his apparent want of progress with the fairy-footed niece.

He was in error.

"This youth," said M. des Rameures, when he was left alone with Madame de Tecle, "has some touch of the ancients, which is something; but he still resembles his father, who was vicious as sin itself. His eyes and his smile recall some traits of his admirable mother; but positively, my dear Elise, he is the portrait of his father, whose manners and whose principles they say he has inherited."

"Who says so, uncle?"

"Current rumor, niece."

"Current rumor, my dear uncle, is often mistaken, and always exaggerates. For my part, I like the young man, who seems thoroughly refined and at his ease."

"Bah! I suppose because he compared you to a nymph in the fable."

"If he compared me to a nymph in the fable he was wrong; but he never addressed to me a word in French that was not in good taste. Before we condemn him, uncle, let us see for ourselves. It is a habit you have always recommended to me, you know."

"You can not deny, niece," said the old man with irritation, "that he exhales the most decided and disagreeable odor of Paris! He is too polite too studied! Not a shadow of enthusiasm no fire of youth! He never laughs as I should wish to see a man of his age laugh; a young man should roar to split his waistband!"

"What! you would see him merry so soon after losing his father in such a tragic manner, and he himself nearly ruined! Why, uncle, what can you mean?"

"Well, well, perhaps you are right. I retract all I have said against him. If he be half ruined I will offer him my advice and my purse if he need it for the sake of the memory of his mother, whom you resemble. Ah, 'tis thus we end all our disputes, naughty child! I grumble; I am passionate; I act like a Tartar. Then you speak with your good sense and sweetness, my darling, and the tiger becomes a lamb. All unhappy beings whom you approach in the same way submit to your subtle charm. And that is the reason why my old friend, La Fontaine, said of you:

'Sur differentes fleurs l'abeille se repose,
Et fait du miel de toute chose!'"

CHAPTER VIII. A DISH OF POLITICS

Elise de Teclc was thirty years of age, but appeared much younger. At seventeen she had married, under peculiar conditions, her cousin Roland de Teclc. She had been left an orphan at an early age and educated by her mother's brother, M. des Rameures. Roland lived very near her Everything brought them together the wishes of the family, compatibility of fortune, their relations as neighbors, and a personal sympathy. They were both charming; they were destined for each other from infancy, and the time fixed for their marriage was the nineteenth birthday of Elise. In anticipation of this happy event the Comte de Teclc rebuilt almost entirely one wing of his castle for the exclusive use of the young pair. Roland was continually present, superintending and urging on the work with all the ardor of a lover.

One morning loud and alarming cries from the new wing roused all the inhabitants of the castle; the Count burned to the spot, and found his son stunned and bleeding in the arms of one of the workmen. He had fallen from a high scaffolding to the pavement. For several months the unfortunate young man hovered between life and death; but in the paroxysms of fever he never ceased calling for his cousin his betrothed; and they were obliged to admit the young girl to his bedside. Slowly he recovered, but was ever after disfigured and lame; and the first time they allowed him to look in a glass he had a fainting-fit that proved almost fatal.

But he was a youth of high principle and true courage. On recovering from his swoon he wept a flood of bitter tears, which would not, however, wash the scars from his disfigured face. He prayed long and earnestly; then shut himself up with his father. Each wrote a letter, the one to M. des Rameures, the other to Elise. M. des Rameures and his niece were then in Germany. The excitement and fatigue consequent upon nursing her cousin had so broken her health that the physicians urged a trial of the baths of Ems. There she received these letters; they released her from her engagement and gave her absolute liberty.

Roland and his father implored her not to return in haste; explained that their intention was to leave the country in a few weeks' time and establish themselves at Paris; and added that they expected no answer, and that their resolution impelled by simple justice to her was irrevocable.

Their wishes were complied with. No answer came.

Roland, his sacrifice once made, seemed calm and resigned; but he fell into a sort of languor, which made fearful progress and hinted at a speedy and fatal termination, for which in fact he seemed to long. One evening they had taken him to the lime-tree terrace at the foot of the garden. He gazed with absent eye on the tints with which the setting sun purpled the glades of the wood, while his father paced the terrace with long strides—smiling as he passed him and hastily brushing away a tear as he turned his back.

Suddenly Elise de Teclc appeared before them, like an angel dropped from heaven. She knelt before the crippled youth, kissed his hand, and, brightening him with the rays of her beautiful eyes, told him she never had loved him half so well before. He felt she spoke truly; he accepted her devotion, and they were married soon after.

Madame de Teclc was happy but she alone was so. Her husband, notwithstanding the tenderness with which she treated him notwithstanding the happiness which he could not fail to read in her tranquil glance notwithstanding the birth of a daughter seemed never to console himself. Even with her he was always possessed by a cold constraint; some secret sorrow consumed him, of which they found the key only on the day of his death.

"My darling," he then said to his young wife "my darling, may God reward you for your infinite goodness! Pardon me, if I never have told you how entirely I love you. With a face like mine, how could I speak of love to

one like you! But my poor heart has been brimming over with it all the while. Oh, Elise! how I have suffered when I thought of what I was before how much more worthy of you! But we shall be reunited, dearest shall we not? where I shall be as perfect as you, and where I may tell you how much I adore you! Do not weep for me, my own Elise! I am happy now, for the first time, for I have dared to open my heart to you. Dying men do not fear ridicule. Farewell, Elise darling—wife! I love you!" These tender words were his last.

After her husband's death, Madame de Teclé lived with her father-in-law, but passed much of her time with her uncle. She busied herself with the greatest solicitude in the education of her daughter, and kept house for both the old men, by both of whom she was equally idolized.

From the lips of the priest at Reuilly, whom he called on next day, Camors learned some of these details, while the old man practiced the violoncello with his heavy spectacles on his nose. Despite his fixed resolution of preserving universal scorn, Camors could not resist a vague feeling of respect for Madame de Teclé; but it did not entirely eradicate the impure sentiment he was disposed to dedicate to her. Fully determined to make her, if not his victim, at least his ally, he felt that this enterprise was one of unusual difficulty. But he was energetic, and did not object to difficulties especially when they took such charming shape as in the present instance.

His meditations on this theme occupied him agreeably the rest of that week, during which time he overlooked his workmen and conferred with his architect. Besides, his horses, his books, his domestics, and his journals arrived successively to dispel ennui. Therefore he looked remarkably well when he jumped out of his dog-cart the ensuing Monday in front of M. des Rameures's door under the eyes of Madame de Teclé. As the latter gently stroked with her white hand the black and smoking shoulder of the thoroughbred Fitz—Aymon, Camors was for the first time presented to the Comte de Teclé, a quiet, sad, and taciturn old gentleman. The cure, the subprefect of the district and his wife, the tax-collector, the family physician, and the tutor completed, as the journals say, the list of the guests.

During dinner Camors, secretly excited by the immediate vicinity of Madame de Teclé, essayed to triumph over that hostility that the presence of a stranger invariably excites in the midst of intimacies which it disturbs. His calm superiority asserted itself so mildly it was pardoned for its grace. Without a gayety unbecoming his mourning, he nevertheless made such lively sallies and such amusing jokes about his first mishaps at Reuilly as to break up the stiffness of the party. He conversed pleasantly with each one in turn, and, seeming to take the deepest interest in his affairs, put him at once at his ease.

He skilfully gave M. des Rameures the opportunity for several happy quotations; spoke naturally to him of artificial pastures, and artificially of natural pastures; of breeding and of non-breeding cows; of Dishley sheep and of a hundred other matters he had that morning crammed from an old encyclopaedia and a county almanac.

To Madame de Teclé directly he spoke little, but he did not speak one word during the dinner that was not meant for her; and his manner to women was so caressing, yet so chivalric, as to persuade them, even while pouring out their wine, that he was ready to die for them. The dear charmers thought him a good, simple fellow, while he was the exact reverse.

On leaving the table they went out of doors to enjoy the starlight evening, and M. des Rameures whose natural hospitality was somewhat heightened by a goblet of his own excellent wine said to Camors:

"My dear Count, you eat honestly, you talk admirably, you drink like a man. On my word, I am disposed to regard you as perfection as a paragon of neighbors if in addition to all the rest you add the crowning one. Do you love music?"

"Passionately!" answered Camors, with effusion.

"Passionately? Bravo! That is the way one should love everything that is worth loving. I am delighted, for we make here a troupe of fanatical melomaniacs, as you will presently perceive. As for myself, I scrape wildly on the violin, as a simple country amateur 'Orpheus in silvis'. Do not imagine, however, Monsieur le Comte, that we let the worship of this sweet art absorb all our faculties all our time—certainly not. When you take part in our little reunions, which of course you will do, you will find we disdain no pursuit worthy of thinking beings. We pass from music to literature to science even to philosophy; but we do this I pray you to believe without pedantry and without leaving the tone of familiar converse. Sometimes we read verses, but we never make them; we love the ancients and do not fear the moderns: we only fear those who would lower the mind and debase the heart. We love the past while we render justice to the present; and flatter ourselves at not seeing many things that to you appear beautiful, useful, and true.

"Such are we, my young friend. We call ourselves the 'Colony of Enthusiasts,' but our malicious neighbors call us the 'Hotel de Rambouillet.' Envy, you know, is a plant that does not flourish in the country; but here, by way of exception, we have a few jealous people rather bad for them, but of no consequence to us.

"We are an odd set, with the most opposite opinions. For me, I am a Legitimist; then there is Durocher, my physician and friend, who is a rabid Republican; Hedouin, the tutor, is a parliamentarian; while Monsieur our sub-prefect is a devotee to the government, as it is his duty to be. Our cure is a little Roman I am Gallican 'et sic ceteris'. Very well we all agree wonderfully for two reasons: first, because we are sincere, which is a very rare thing; and then because all opinions contain at bottom some truth, and because, with some slight mutual concessions, all really honest people come very near having the same opinions.

"Such, my dear Count, are the views that hold in my drawing-room, or rather in the drawing-room of my niece; for if you would see the divinity who makes all our happiness look at her! It is in deference to her good taste, her good sense, and her moderation, that each of us avoids that violence and that passion which warps the best intentions. In one word, to speak truly, it is love that makes our common tie and our mutual protection. We are all in love with my niece myself first, of course; next Durocher, for thirty years; then the subprefect and all the rest of them.

"You, too, Cure! you know that you are in love with Elise, in all honor and all good faith, as we all are, and as Monsieur de Camors shall soon be, if he is not so already eh, Monsieur le Comte?"

Camors protested, with a sinister smile, that he felt very much inclined to fulfil the prophecy of his host; and they reentered the dining-room to find the circle increased by the arrival of several visitors. Some of these rode, others came on foot from the country-seats around.

M. des Rameures soon seized his violin; while he tuned it, little Marie seated herself at the piano, and her mother, coming behind her, rested her hand lightly on her shoulder, as if to beat the measure.

"The music will be nothing new to you," Camors's host said to him. "It is simply Schubert's Serenade, which we have arranged, or deranged, after our own fancy; of which you shall judge. My niece sings, and the curate and I 'Arcades ambo' respond successively he on the bass-viol and I on my Stradivarius. Come, my dear Cure, let us begin 'incipe, Mopse, prior."

In spite of the masterly execution of the old gentleman and of the delicate science of the cure, it was Madame de Teclé who appeared to Camors the most remarkable of the three virtuosi. The calm repose of her features, and the gentle dignity of her attitude, contrasting with the passionate swell of her voice, he found most attractive.

In his turn he seated himself at the piano, and played a difficult accompaniment with real taste; and having a good tenor voice, and a thorough knowledge of its powers, he exerted them so effectually as to produce a profound sensation. During the rest of the evening he kept much in the background in order to observe the company, and

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur de Camors, v1

was much astonished thereby. The tone of this little society, as much removed from vulgar gossip as from affected pedantry, was truly elevated. There was nothing to remind him of a porter's lodge, as in most provincial salons; or of the greenroom of a theatre, as in many salons of Paris; nor yet, as he had feared, of a lecture-room.

There were five or six women some pretty, all well bred who, in adopting the habit of thinking, had not lost the habit of laughing, nor the desire to please. But they all seemed subject to the same charm; and that charm was sovereign. Madame de Teclé, half hidden on her sofa, and seemingly busied with her embroidery, animated all by a glance, softened all by a word. The glance was inspiring; the word always appropriate. Her decision on all points they regarded as final as that of a judge who sentences, or of a woman who is beloved.

No verses were read that evening, and Camors was not bored. In the intervals of the music, the conversation touched on the new comedy by Augier; the last work of Madame Sand; the latest poem of Tennyson; or the news from America.

"My dear Mopsus," M. des Rameures said to the cure, "you were about to read us your sermon on superstition last Thursday, when you were interrupted by that joker who climbed the tree in order to hear you better. Now is the time to recompense us. Take this seat and we will all listen to you."

The worthy cure took the seat, unfolded his manuscript, and began his discourse, which we shall not here report: profiting by the example of our friend Sterne, not to mingle the sacred with the profane.

The sermon met with general approval, though some persons, M. des Rameures among them, thought it above the comprehension of the humble class for whom it was intended. M. de Teclé, however, backed by republican Durocher, insisted that the intelligence of the people was underrated; that they were frequently debased by those who pretended to speak only up to their level and the passages in dispute were retained.

How they passed from the sermon on superstition to the approaching marriage of the General, I can not say; but it was only natural after all, for the whole country, for twenty miles around, was ringing with it. This theme excited Camors's attention at once, especially when the sub-prefect intimated with much reserve that the General, busied with his new surroundings, would probably resign his office as deputy.

"But that would be embarrassing," exclaimed Des Rameures. "Who the deuce would replace him? I give you warning, Monsieur Prefect, if you intend imposing on us some Parisian with a flower in his buttonhole, I shall pack him back to his club him, his flower, and his buttonhole! You may set that down for a sure thing "

"Dear uncle!" said Madame de Teclé, indicating Camors with a glance.

"I understand you, Elise," laughingly rejoined M. des Rameures, "but I must beg Monsieur de Camors to believe that I do not in any case intend to offend him. I shall also beg him to tolerate the monomania of an old man, and some freedom of language with regard to the only subject which makes him lose his sang froid."

"And what is that subject, Monsieur?" said Camors, with his habitual captivating grace of manner.

"That subject, Monsieur, is the arrogant supremacy assumed by Paris over all the rest of France. I have not put my foot in the place since 1825, in order to testify the abhorrence with which it inspires me. You are an educated, sensible young man, and, I trust, a good Frenchman. Very well! Is it right, I ask, that Paris shall every morning send out to us our ideas ready-made, and that all France shall become a mere humble, servile faubourg to the capital? Do me the favor, I pray you, Monsieur, to answer that?"

"There is doubtless, my dear sir," replied Camors, "some excess in this extreme centralization of France; but all civilized countries must have their capitals, and a head is just as necessary to a nation as to an individual."

"Taking your own image, Monsieur, I shall turn it against you. Yes, doubtless a head is as necessary to a nation as to an individual; if, however, the head becomes monstrous and deformed, the seat of intelligence will be turned into that of idiocy, and in place of a man of intellect, you have a hydrocephalus. Pray give heed to what Monsieur the Sub-prefect, may say in answer to what I shall ask him. Now, my dear Sub-prefect, be frank. If tomorrow, the deputation of this district should become vacant, can you find within its broad limits, or indeed within the district, a man likely to fill all functions, good and bad?"

"Upon my word," answered the official, "if you continue to refuse the office, I really know of no one else fit for it."

"I shall persist all my life, Monsieur, for at my age assuredly I shall not expose myself to the buffoonery of your Parisian jesters."

"Very well! In that event you will be obliged to take some stranger perhaps, even one of those Parisian jesters."

"You have heard him, Monsieur de Camors," said M. des Rameures, with exultation. "This district numbers six hundred thousand souls, and yet does not contain within it the material for one deputy. There is no other civilized country, I submit, in which we can find a similar instance so scandalous. For the people of France this shame is reserved exclusively, and it is your Paris that has brought it upon us. Paris, absorbing all the blood, life, thought, and action of the country, has left a mere geographical skeleton in place of a nation! These are the benefits of your centralization, since you have pronounced that word, which is quite as barbarous as the thing itself."

"But pardon me, uncle," said Madame de Teclé, quietly plying her needle, "I know nothing of these matters, but it seems to me that I have heard you say this centralization was the work of the Revolution and of the First Consul. Why, therefore, do you call Monsieur de Camors to account for it? That certainly does not seem to me just."

"Nor does it seem so to me," said Camors, bowing to Madame de Teclé.

"Nor to me either," rejoined M. des Rameures, smiling.

"However, Madame," resumed Camors, "I may to some extent be held responsible in this matter, for though, as you justly suggest, I have not brought about this centralization, yet I confess I strongly approve the course of those who did."

"Bravo! So much the better, Monsieur. I like that. One should have his own positive opinions, and defend them."

"Monsieur," said Camors, "I shall make an exception in your honor, for when I dine out, and especially when I dine well, I always have the same opinion with my host; but I respect you too highly not to dare to differ with you. Well, then, I think the revolutionary Assembly, and subsequently the First Consul, were happily inspired in imposing a vigorous centralized political administration upon France. I believe, indeed, that it was indispensable at the time, in order to mold and harden our social body in its new form, to adjust it in its position, and fix it firmly under the new laws that is, to establish and maintain this powerful French unity which has become our national peculiarity, our genius and our strength."

"You speak rightly, sir," exclaimed Durocher.

"Parbleu I unquestionably you are right," warmly rejoined M. des Rameures. "Yes, that is quite true. The excessive centralization of which I complain has had its hour of utility, nay, even of necessity, I will admit; but, Monsieur, in what human institution do you pretend to implant the absolute, the eternal? Feudalism, also, my dear sir, was a benefit and a progress in its day, but that which was a benefit yesterday may it not become an evil to-morrow a danger? That which is progress to-day, may it not one hundred years hence have become mere

routine, and a downright trammel? Is not that the history of the world? And if you wish to know, Monsieur, by what sign we may recognize the fact that a social or political system has attained its end, I will tell you: it is when it is manifest only in its inconveniences and abuses. Then the machine has finished its work, and should be replaced. Indeed, I declare that French centralization has reached its critical term, that fatal point at which, after protecting, it oppresses; at which, after vivifying, it paralyzes; at which, having saved France, it crushes her."

"Dear uncle, you are carried away by your subject," said Madame de Teclé.

"Yes, Elise, I am carried away, I admit, but I am right. Everything justifies me the past and the present, I am sure; and so will the future, I fear. Did I say the past? Be assured, Monsieur de Camors, I am not a narrow-minded admirer of the past. Though a Legitimist from personal affections, I am a downright Liberal in principles. You know that, Durocher? Well, then, in short, formerly between the Alps, the Rhine, and the Pyrenees, was a great country which lived, thought, and acted, not exclusively through its capital, but for itself. It had a head, assuredly; but it had also a heart, muscles, nerves, and veins with blood in them, and yet the head lost nothing by that. There was then a France, Monsieur. The province had an existence, subordinate doubtless, but real, active, and independent. Each government, each office, each parliamentary centre was a living intellectual focus. The great provincial institutions and local liberties exercised the intellect on all sides, tempered the character, and developed men. And now note well, Durocher! If France had been centralized formerly as to-day, your dear Revolution never would have occurred do you understand? Never! because there would have been no men to make it. For may I not ask, whence came that prodigious concourse of intelligences all fully armed, and with heroic hearts, which the great social movement of '78 suddenly brought upon the scene? Please recall to mind the most illustrious men of that era lawyers, orators, soldiers. How many were from Paris? All came from the provinces, the fruitful womb of France! But to-day we have simply need of a deputy, peaceful times; and yet, out of six hundred thousand souls, as we have seen, we can not find one suitable man. Why is this the case, gentlemen? Because upon the soil of uncentralized France men grew, while only functionaries germinate in the soil of centralized France."

"God bless you, Monsieur!" said the Sub-prefect, with a smile.

"Pardon me, my dear Sub-prefect, but you, too, should understand that I really plead your cause as well as my own, when I claim for the provinces, and for all the functions of provincial life, more independence, dignity, and grandeur. In the state to which these functions are reduced at present, the administration and the judiciary are equally stripped of power, prestige, and patronage. You smile, Monsieur, but no longer, as formerly, are they the centres of life, of emulation, and of light, civic schools and manly gymnasiums; they have become merely simple, passive clockwork; and that is the case with the rest, Monsieur de Camors. Our municipal institutions are a mere farce, our provincial assemblies only a name, our local liberties naught! Consequently, we have not now a man for a deputy. But why should we complain? Does not Paris undertake to live, to think for us? Does she not deign to cast to us, as of yore the Roman Senate cast to the suburban plebeians, our food for the day-bread and vaudevilles 'panem et circenses'. Yes, Monsieur, let us turn from the past to the present to France of to-day! A nation of forty millions of people who await each morning from Paris the signal to know whether it is day or night, or whether, indeed, they shall laugh or weep! A great people, once the noblest, the cleverest in the world, repeating the same day, at the same hour, in all the salons, and at all the crossways in the empire, the same imbecile gabble engendered the evening before in the mire of the boulevards. I tell you? Monsieur, it is humiliating that all Europe, once jealous of us, should now shrug her shoulders in our faces. Besides, it is fatal even for Paris, which, permit me to add, drunk with prosperity in its haughty isolation and self-fetishism, not a little resembles the Chinese Empire—a focus of warmed-over, corrupt, and frivolous civilization! As for the future, my dear sir, may God preserve me from despair, since it concerns my country! This age has already seen great things, great marvels, in fact; for I beg you to remember I am by no means an enemy to my time. I approve the Revolution, liberty, equality, the press, railways, and the telegraph; and as I often say to Monsieur le Cure, every cause that would live must accommodate itself cheerfully to the progress of its epoch, and study how to serve itself by it. Every cause that is in antagonism with its age commits suicide. Indeed, Monsieur, I trust this

century will see one more great event, the end of this Parisian tyranny, and the resuscitation of provincial life; for I must repeat, my dear sir, that your centralization, which was once an excellent remedy, is a detestable regimen! It is a horrible instrument of oppression and tyranny, ready-made for all hands, suitable for every despotism, and under it France stifles and wastes away. You must agree with me yourself, Durocher; in this sense the Revolution overshot its mark, and placed in jeopardy even its purposes; for you, who love liberty, and do not wish it merely for yourself alone, as some of your friends do, but for all the world, surely you can not admire centralization, which proscribes liberty as manifestly as night obscures the day. As for my part, gentlemen, there are two things which I love equally liberty and France. Well, then, as I believe in God, do I believe that both must perish in the throes of some convulsive catastrophe if all the life of the nation shall continue to be concentrated in the brain, and the great reform for which I call is not made: if a vast system of local franchise, if provincial institutions, largely independent and conformable to the modern spirit, are not soon established to yield fresh blood for our exhausted veins, and to fertilize our impoverished soil. Undoubtedly the work will be difficult and complicated; it will demand a firm resolute hand, but the hand that may accomplish it will have achieved the most patriotic work of the century. Tell that to your sovereign, Monsieur Sub-prefect; say to him that if he do that, there is one old French heart that will bless him. Tell him, also, that he will encounter much passion, much derision, much danger, peradventure; but that he will have a commensurate recompense when he shall see France, like Lazarus, delivered from its swathings and its shroud, rise again, sound and whole, to salute him!"

These last words the old gentleman had pronounced with fire, emotion, and extraordinary dignity; and the silence and respect with which he had been listened to were prolonged after he had ceased to speak. This appeared to embarrass him, but taking the arm of Camors he said, with a smile, "'Semel insanivimus omnes.' My dear sir, every one has his madness. I trust that mine has not offended you. Well, then, prove it to me by accompanying me on the piano in this song of the sixteenth century."

Camors complied with his usual good taste; and the song of the sixteenth century terminated the evening's entertainment; but the young Count, before leaving, found the means of causing Madame de Teclé the most profound astonishment. He asked her, in a low voice, and with peculiar emphasis, whether she would be kind enough, at her leisure, to grant him the honor of a moment's private conversation.

Madame de Teclé opened still wider those large eyes of hers, blushed slightly, and replied that she would be at home the next afternoon at four o'clock.