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A ROMANCE OF YOUTH

By FRANCOIS COPPEE

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XI

SUCCESS

Success, which usually is as fickle as justice, took long strides and doubled its stations in order to reach Amedee. The Cafe de Seville, and the coterie of long-haired writers, were busying themselves with the rising poet already. His suite of sonnets, published in La Guepe, pleased some of the journalists, who reproduced them in portions in well-distributed journals. Ten days after Amedee's meeting with Jocquelet, the latter recited his poem "Before Sebastopol" at a magnificent entertainment given at the Gaité for the benefit of an illustrious actor who had become blind and reduced to poverty.

This "dramatic solemnity," to use the language of the advertisement, began by being terribly tiresome. There was an audience present who were accustomed to grand Parisian soirees, a blase and satiated public, who, upon this warm evening in the suffocating theatre, were more fatigued and satiated than ever. The sleepy journalists collapsed in their chairs, and in the back part of the stage-boxes, ladies' faces, almost green under paint, showed the excessive lassitude of a long winter of pleasure. The Parisians had all come there from custom, without having the slightest desire to do so, just as they always came, like galley-slaves condemned to "first nights." They were so lifeless that they did not even feel the slightest horror at seeing one another grow old. This chloroformed audience was afflicted with a long and too heavy programme, as is the custom in performances of this kind. They played fragments of the best known pieces, and sang songs from operas long since fallen into

disuse even on street organs. This public saw the same comedians march out; the most famous are the most monotonous; the comical ones abused their privileges; the lover spoke distractedly through his nose; the great coquette--the actress par excellence, the last of the Celimenes--discharged her part in such a sluggish way that when she began an adverb ending in "ment," one would have almost had time to go out and smoke a cigarette or drink a glass of beer before she reached the end of the said adverb.

But at the most lethargic moment of this drowsy soirees, after the comedians from the Francais had played in a stately manner one act from a tragedy, Jocquelet appeared. Jocquelet, still a pupil at the Conservatoire, showed himself to the public for the first time and by an exceptional grace--Jocquelet, absolutely unknown, too short in his evening clothes, in spite of the two packs of cards that he had put in his boots. He appeared, full of audacity, riding his high horse, raising his flat-nosed, bull-dog face toward the "gallery gods," and, in his voice capable of making Jericho's wall fall or raising Jehoshaphat's dead, he dashed off in one effort, but with intelligence and heroic feeling, his comrade's poem.

The effect was prodigious. This bold, common, but powerful actor, and these picturesque and modern verses were something entirely new to this public satiated with old trash. What a happy surprise! Two novelties at once! To think of discovering an unheard-of poet and an unknown comedian! To nibble at these two green fruits! Everybody shook off his torpor; the anaesthetized journalists aroused themselves; the colorless and sleepy ladies plucked up a little animation; and when Jocquelet had made the last rhyme resound like a grand flourish of trumpets, all applauded enough to split their gloves.

In one of the theatre lobbies, behind a bill-board pasted over with old placards, Amedee Violette heard with delight the sound of the applause which seemed like a shower of hailstones. He dared not think of it! Was it really his poem that produced so much excitement, which had thawed this cold public? Soon he did not doubt it, for Jocquelet, who had just been recalled three times, threw himself into the poet's arms and glued his perspiring, painted face to his.

"Well, my little one, I have done it!" he exclaimed, bursting with gratification and vanity. "You heard how I caught them!"

Immediately twenty, thirty, a hundred spectators appeared, most of them very correct in white cravats, but all eager and with beaming countenances, asking to see the author and the interpreter, and to be presented to them, that they might congratulate them with an enthusiastic word and a shake of the hand. Yes! it was a success, an instantaneous one. It was certainly that rare tropical flower of the Parisian greenhouse which blossoms out so seldom, but so magnificently.

One large, very common-looking man, wearing superb diamond shirt-buttons, came in his turn to shake Amedee's hand, and in a hoarse, husky voice which would have been excellent to propose tickets "cheaper than at the

office!" he asked for the manuscript of the poem that had just been recited.

"It is so that I may put you upon the first page of my tomorrow's edition, young man, and I publish eighty thousand. Victor Gaillard, editor of 'Le Tapage'. Does that please you?"

He took the manuscript without listening to the thanks of the poet, who trembled with joy at the thought that his work had caught the fancy of this Barnum of the press, the foremost advertiser in France and Europe, and that his verses would meet the eyes of two hundred thousand readers.

Yes, it was certainly a success, and he experienced the first bitterness of it as soon as he arrived the next morning at the Cafe de Seville, where he now went every two or three days at the hour for absinthe. His verses had appeared in that morning's Tapage, printed in large type and headed by a few lines of praise written by Victor Gaillard, a la Barnum. As soon as Amedee entered the caf he saw that he was the object of general attention, and the lyric gentlemen greeted him with acclamations and bravos; but at certain expressions of countenance, constrained looks, and bitter smiles, the impressionable young man felt with a sudden sadness that they already envied him.

"I warned you of it," said Paul Sillery to him, as he led him into a corner of the cafe. "Our good friends are not pleased, and that is very natural. The greater part of these rhymers are 'cheap jewellers,' and they are jealous of a master workman. Above all things, pretend not to notice it; they will never forgive you for guessing their bad sentiments. And then you must be indulgent to them. You have your beautiful lieutenant's epaulettes, Violette, do not be too hard upon these poor privates. They also are fighting under the poetic flag, and ours is a poverty-stricken regiment. Now you must profit by your good luck. Here you are, celebrated in forty-eight hours. Do you see, even the political people look at you with curiosity, although a poet in the estimation of these austere persons is an inferior and useless being. It is all they will do to accept Victor Hugo, and only on account of his 'Chatiments.' You are the lion of the day. Lose no time. I met just now upon the boulevard Massif, the publisher. He had read 'Le Tapage' and expects you. Carry him all your poems to-morrow; there will be enough to make a volume. Massif will publish it at his own expense, and you will appear before the public in one month. You never will inveigle a second time that big booby of a Gaillard, who took a mere passing fancy for you. But no matter! I know your book, and it will be a success. You are launched. Forward, march! Truly, I am better than I thought, for your success gives me pleasure."

This amiable comrade's words easily dissipated the painful feelings that Amedee had just experienced. However, it was one of those exalted moments when one will not admit that evil exists. He spent some time with the poets, forcing himself to be more gracious and friendly than ever, and left them persuaded--the unsuspecting child!--that he had disarmed them by his modesty; and very impatient to share his joy with his friends, the Gerards, he quickly walked the length of Montmartre and

reached them just at their dinner hour.

They did not expect him, and only had for their dinner the remains of the boiled beef of the night before, with some cucumbers. Amedee carried his cake, as usual, and, what was better still, two sauces that always make the poorest meal palatable--hope and happiness.

They had already read the journals and knew that the poem had been applauded at the Gaité, and that it had at once been printed on the first page of the journal; and they were all so pleased, so glad, that they kissed Amedee on both cheeks. Mamma Gerard remembered that she had a few bottles--five or six--of old chambertin in the cellar, and you could not have prevented the excellent woman from taking her key and taper at once, and going for those old bottles covered with cobwebs and dust, that they might drink to the health of the triumphant one. As to Louise, she was radiant, for in several houses where she gave lessons she had heard them talk of the fine and admirable verses published in *Le Tapage*, and she was very proud to think that the author was a friend of hers. What completed Amedee's pleasure was that for the first time Maria seemed to be interested in his poem, and said several times to him, with such a pretty, vain little air:

"Do you know, your battle is very nice. Amedee, you are going to become a great poet, a celebrated man! What a superb future you have before you!"

Ah! what exquisitely sweet hopes he carried away that evening to his room in the Faubourg St.-Jacques! They gave him beautiful dreams, and pervaded his thoughts the next morning when the concierge brought him two letters.

Still more happiness! The first letter contained two notes of a hundred francs each, with Victor Gaillard's card, who congratulated Amedee anew and asked him to write something for his journal in the way of prose; a story, or anything he liked. The young poet gave a cry of joyful surprise when he recognized the handwriting of Maurice Roger upon the other envelope.

"I have just returned to Paris, my dear Amedee," wrote the traveller, "and your success was my first greeting. I must embrace you quickly and tell you how happy I am. Come to see me at four o'clock in my den in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. We will dine and pass the evening together."

Ah! how the poet loved life that morning, how good and sweet it seemed to him! Clothed in his best, he gayly descended the Rue St.-Jacques, where boxes of asparagus and strawberries perfumed the fruit-stalls, and went to the Boulevard St. Michel, where he purchased an elegant gray felt hat and a new cravat. Then he went to the Cafe Voltaire, where he lunched. He changed his second hundred-franc bill, so that he might feel, with the pleasure of a child, the beautiful louis d'or which he owed to his work and its success. At the office the head clerk--a good fellow, who sang well at dinners--complimented Amedee upon his poem. The young man had only made his appearance to ask for leave that afternoon, so as to take

his manuscript to the publisher.

Once more in the street in the bright May sun, after the fashion of nabobs, he took an open carriage and was carried to Massif, in the Passage des Princes. The editor of the Jeunes was seated in his office, which was decorated with etchings and beautiful bindings. He is well known by his magnificent black beard and his large bald head, upon which a wicked jester once advised him to paste his advertisements; he publishes the works of audacious authors and sensational books, and had the honor of sharing with Charles Bazile, the poet, an imprisonment at St.-Pelagie. He received this thin-faced rhymers coldly. Amedee introduced himself, and at once there was a broad smile, a handshake, and a connoisseur's greedy sniffing. Then Massif opened the manuscript.

"Let us see! Ah, yes, with margins and false titles we can make out two hundred and fifty pages."

The business was settled quickly. A sheet of stamped paper--an agreement! Massif will pay all the expenses of the first edition of one thousand, and if there is another edition--and of course there will be!--he will give him ten cents a copy. Amedee signs without reading. All that he asks is that the volume should be published without delay.

"Rest easy, my dear poet! You will receive the first proofs in three days, and in one month it will appear."

Was it possible? Was Amedee not dreaming? He, poor Violette's son, the little office clerk--his book would be published, and in a month! Readers and unknown friends will be moved by his agitation, will suffer in his suspense; young people will love him and find an echo of their sentiments in his verses; women will dreamily repeat--with one finger in his book--some favorite verse that touches their hearts! Ah! he must have a confidant in his joy, he must tell some true friend.

"Driver, take me to the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince."

He mounted, four steps at a time, the stairs leading to Maurice's room. The key is in the door. He enters and finds the traveller there, standing in the midst of the disorder of open trunks.

"Maurice!"

"Amedee!"

What an embrace! How long they stood hand in hand, looking at each other with happy smiles!

Maurice is more attractive and gracious than ever. His beauty is more manly, and his golden moustache glistens against his sun-browned skin. What a fine fellow! How he rejoiced at his friend's first success!

"I am certain that your book will turn everybody's head. I always told you that you were a genuine poet. We shall see!"

As to himself, he was happy too. His mother had let him off from studying law and allowed him to follow his vocation. He was going to have a studio and paint. It had all been decided in Italy, where Madame Roger had witnessed her son's enthusiasm over the great masters. Ah, Italy! Italy! and he began to tell of his trip, show knickknacks and souvenirs of all kinds that littered the room. He turned in his hands, that he might show all its outlines, a little terra-cotta reduction of the Antinous in the Museum of Naples. He opened a box, full to bursting, of large photographs, and passed them to his friend with exclamations of retrospective admiration.

"Look! the Coliseum! the ruins of Paestum--and this antique from the Vatican! Is it not beautiful?"

While looking at the pictures he recalled the things that he had seen and the impressions he had experienced. There was a band of collegians in little capes and short trousers taking their walk; they wore buckled shoes, like the abbés of olden times, and nothing could be more droll than to see these childish priests play leapfrog. There, upon the Riva dei Schiavoni, he had followed a Venetian. "Shabbily dressed, and fancy, my friend, bare-headed, in a yellow shawl with ragged green fringe! No, I do not know whether she was pretty, but she possessed in her person all the attractions of Giorgione's goddesses and Titian's courtesans combined!"

Maurice is still the same wicked fellow. But, bah! it suits him; he even boasts of it with such a joyous ardor and such a youthful dash, that it is only one charm the more in him. The clock struck seven, and they went to dine. They started off through the Latin Quarter. Maurice gave his arm to Amedee and told him of his adventures on the other side of the Alps. Maurice, once started on this subject, could not stop, and while the dinner was being served the traveller continued to describe his escapades. This kind of conversation was dangerous for Amedee; for it must not be forgotten that for some time the young poet's innocence had weighed upon him, and this evening he had some pieces of gold in his pocket that rang a chime of pleasure. While Maurice, with his elbow upon the table, told him his tales of love, Amedee gazed out upon the sidewalk at the women who passed by in fresh toilettes, in the gaslight which illuminated the green foliage, giving a little nod of the head to those whom they knew. There was voluptuousness in the very air, and it was Amedee who arose from the table and recalled to Maurice that it was Thursday, and that there was a fete that night at Bullier's; and he also was the one to add, with a deliberate air:

"Shall we take a turn there?"

"Willingly," replied his gay friend. "Ah, ha! we are then beginning to enjoy ourselves a little, Monsieur Violette! Go to Bullier's? so be it. I am not sorry to assure myself whether or not I still love the Parisians."

They started off, smoking their cigarettes. Upon the highway, going in

the same direction as themselves, were victorias carrying women in spring costumes and wearing bonnets decked with flowers. From time to time the friends were elbowed by students shouting popular refrains and walking in Indian-file.

Here is Bullier's! They step into the blazing entrance, and go thence to the stairway which leads to the celebrated public ballroom. They are stifled by the odor of dust, escaping gas, and human flesh. Alas! there are in every village in France doctors in hansom cabs, country lawyers, and any quantity of justices of the peace, who, I can assure you, regret this stench as they take the fresh air in the open country under the starry heavens, breathing the exquisite perfume of new-mown hay; for it is mingled with the little poetry that they have had in their lives, with their student's love-affairs, and their youth.

All the same, this Bullier's is a low place, a caricature of the Alhambra in pasteboard. Three or four thousand moving heads in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and an exasperating orchestra playing a quadrille in which dancers twist and turn, tossing their legs with calm faces and audacious gestures.

"What a mob!" said Amedee, already a trifle disgusted. "Let us go into the garden."

They were blinded by the gas there; the thickets looked so much like old scenery that one almost expected to see the yellow breastplates of comic-opera dragoons; and the jet of water recalled one of those little spurts of a shooting-gallery upon which an empty egg-shell dances. But they could breathe there a little.

"Boy! two sodas," said Maurice, striking the table with his cane; and the two friends sat down near the edge of a walk where the crowd passed and repassed. They had been there about ten minutes when two women stopped before them.

"Good-day, Maurice," said the taller, a brunette with rich coloring, the genuine type of a tavern girl.

"What, Margot!" exclaimed the young man. "Will you take something? Sit down a moment, and your friend too. Do you know, your friend is charming? What is her name?"

"Rosine," replied the stranger, modestly, for she was only about eighteen, and, in spite of the blond frizzles over her eyes, she was not yet bold, poor child! She was making her debut, it was easy to see.

"Well, Mademoiselle Rosine, come here, that I may see you," continued Maurice, seating the young girl beside him with a caressing gesture.

"You, Margot, I authorize to be unfaithful to me once more in favor of my friend Amedee. He is suffering with lovesickness, and has a heart to let. Although he is a poet, I think he happens to have in his pocket enough to pay for a supper."

Everywhere and always the same, the egotistical and amiable Maurice takes the lion's share, and Amedee, listening only with one ear to the large Margot, who is already begging him to make an acrostic for her, thinks Rosine is charming, while Maurice says a thousand foolish things to her. In spite of himself, the poet looks upon Maurice as his superior, and thinks it perfectly natural that he should claim the prettier of the two women. No matter! Amedee wanted to enjoy himself too. This Margot, who had just taken off her gloves to drink her wine, had large, red hands, and seemed as silly as a goose, but all the same she was a beautiful creature, and the poet began to talk to her, while she laughed and looked at him with a wanton's eyes. Meanwhile the orchestra burst into a polka, and Maurice, in raising his voice to speak to his friend, called him several times Amedee, and once only by his family name, Violette. Suddenly little Rosine started up and looked at the poet, saying with astonishment:

"What! Is your name Amedee Violette?"

"Certainly."

"Then you are the boy with whom I played so much when I was a child."

"With me?"

"Yes! Do you not remember Rosine, little Rosine Combarieu, at Madame Gerard's, the engraver's wife, in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs? We played games with his little girls. How odd it is, the way one meets old friends!"

What is it that Amedee feels? His entire childhood rises before him. The bitterness of the thought that he had known this poor girl in her innocence and youth, and the Gerards' name spoken in such a place, filled the young man's heart with a singular sadness. He could only say to Rosine, in a voice that trembled a little with pity:

"You! Is it you?"

Then she became red and very embarrassed, lowering her eyes.

Maurice had tact; he noticed that Rosine and Amedee were agitated, and, feeling that he was *de trop*, he arose suddenly and said:

"Now then, Margot. Come on! these children want to talk over their childhood, I think. Give up your acrostic, my child. Take my arm, and come and have a turn."

When they were alone Amedee gazed at Rosine sadly. She was pretty, in spite of her colorless complexion, a child of the faubourg, born with a genius for dress, who could clothe herself on nothing—a linen gown, a flower in her hat. One who lived on salads and vegetables, so as to buy well-made shoes and eighteen-button gloves.

The pretty blonde looked at Amedee, and a timid smile shone in her nut-

brown eyes.

"Now, Monsieur Amedee," said she, at last, "it need not trouble you to meet at Bullier's the child whom you once played with. What would have been astonishing would be to find that I had become a fine lady. I am not wise, it is true, but I work, and you need not fear that I go with the first comer. Your friend is a handsome fellow, and very amiable, and I accepted his attentions because he knew Margot, while with you it is very different. It gives me pleasure to talk with you. It recalls Mamma Gerard, who was so kind to me. What has become of her, tell me? and her husband and her daughters?"

"Monsieur Gerard is dead," replied Amedee; "but the ladies are well, and I see them often."

"Do not tell them that you met me here, will you? It is better not. If I had had a good 'mother, like those girls, things would have turned out differently for me. But, you remember, papa was always interested in his politics. When I was fifteen years old he apprenticed me to a florist. He was a fine master, a perfect monster of a man, who ruined me! I say, Pere Combarieu has a droll trade now; he is manager of a Republican journal--nothing to do--only a few months in prison now and then. I am always working in flowers, and I have a little friend, a pupil at Val-de-Grace, but he has just left as a medical officer for Algeria. I was lonely all by myself, and this evening big Margot, whom I got acquainted with in the shop, brought me here to amuse myself. But you--what are you doing? Your friend said just now that you were a poet. Do you write songs? I always liked them. Do you remember when I used to play airs with one finger upon the Gerards' old piano? You were such a pretty little boy then, and as gentle as a girl. You still have your nice blue eyes, but they are a little darker. I remember them. No, you can not know how glad I am to see you again!"

They continued to chatter, bringing up old reminiscences, and when she spoke of the Gerard ladies she put on a respectful little air which pleased Amedee very much. She was a poor feather-headed little thing, he did not doubt; but she had kept at least the poor man's treasure, a simple heart. The young man was pleased with her prattling, and as he looked at the young girl he thought of the past and felt a sort of compassion for her. As she was silent for a moment, the poet said to her, "Do you know that you have become very pretty? What a charming complexion you have! such a lovely pallor!"

The grisette, who had known what poverty was, gave a bitter little laugh:

"Oh, my pallor! that is nothing! It is not the pallor of wealth."

Then, recovering her good-humor at once, she continued:

"Tell me, Monsieur Amedee, does this big Margot, whom you began to pay attentions to a little while ago, please you?"

Amedee quickly denied it. "That immense creature? Never! Now then,

Rosine, I came here to amuse myself a little, I will admit. That is not forbidden at my age, is it? But this ball disgusts me. You have no appointment here? No? Is it truly no? Very well, take my arm and let us go. Do you live far from here?"

"In the Avenue d'Orleans, near the Montrouge church."

"Will you allow me to escort you home, then?"

She would be happy to, and they arose and left the ball. It seemed to the young poet as if the pretty girl's arm trembled a little in his; but once upon the boulevard, flooded by the light from the silvery moon, Rosine slackened her steps and became pensive, and her eyes were lowered when Amedee sought a glance from them in the obscurity. How sweet was this new desire that troubled the young man's heart! It was mixed with a little sentiment; his heart beat with emotion, and Rosine was not less moved. They could both find only insignificant things to say.

"What a beautiful night!"

"Yes! It does one good to breathe the fresh air."

They continued their walk without speaking. Oh, how fresh and sweet it was under these trees!

At last they reached the door of Rosine's dwelling. With a slow movement she pressed her hand upon the bell-button. Then Amedee, with a great effort, and in a confused, husky voice, asked whether he might go up with her and see her little room.

She looked at him steadily, with a tender sadness in her eyes, and then said to him, softly:

"No, certainly not! One must be sensible. I please you this evening, and you know very well that I think you are charming. It is true we knew each other when we were young, and now that we have met again, it seems as if it would be pleasant to love each other. But, believe me, we should commit a great folly, perhaps a wrong. It is better, I assure you, to forget that you ever met me at Bullier's with big Margot, and only remember your little playmate of the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. It will be better than a caprice, it will be something pure that you can keep in your heart. Do not let us spoil the remembrance of our childhood, Monsieur Amedee, and let us part good friends."

Before the young man could find a reply, the bell pealed again, and Rosine gave Amedee a parting smile, lightly kissing the tips of her fingers, and disappeared behind the door, which fell together, with a loud bang. The poet's first movement was one of rage. Giddy weather-cock of a woman! But he had hardly taken twenty steps upon the sidewalk before he said to himself, with a feeling of remorse, "She was right!" He thought that this poor girl had kept in one corner of her heart a shadow of reserve and modesty, and he was happy to feel rise within him a sacred respect for woman!

Amedee, my good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure.
You had better give it up!

CHAPTER XII

SOCIAL TRIUMPHS

For one month now Amedee Violette's volume of verses, entitled Poems from Nature, had embellished with its pale-blue covers the shelves of the book-shops. The commotion raised by the book's success, and the favorable criticisms given by the journals, had not yet calmed down at the Cafe de Seville.

This emotion, let it be understood, did not exist except among the literary men. The politicians disdained poets and poetry, and did not trouble them selves over such commonplace matters. They had affairs of a great deal more importance to determine the overthrow of the government first, then to remodel the map of Europe! What was necessary to overthrow the Empire? First, conspiracy; second, barricades. Nothing was easier than to conspire. Every body conspired at the Seville. It is the character of the French, who are born cunning, but are light and talkative, to conspire in public places. As soon as one of our compatriots joins a secret society his first care is to go to his favorite restaurant and to confide, under a bond of the most absolute secrecy, to his most intimate friend, what he has known for about five minutes, the aim of the conspiracy, names of the actors, the day, hour, and place of the rendezvous, the passwords and countersigns. A little while after he has thus relieved himself, he is surprised that the police interfere and spoil an enterprise that has been prepared with so much mystery and discretion. It was in this way that the "beards" dealt in dark deeds of conspiracy at the Cafe de Seville. At the hour for absinthe and mazagran a certain number of Fiesques and Catilines were grouped around each table. At one of the tables in the foreground five old "beards," whitened by political crime, were planning an infernal machine; and in the back of the room ten robust hands had sworn upon the billiard-table to arm themselves for regicide; only, as with all "beards," there were necessarily some false ones among them, that is to say, spies. All the plots planned at the Seville had miserably miscarried.

The art of building barricades was also--you never would suspect it!--very ardently and conscientiously studied. This special branch of the science of fortification reckoned more than one Vauban and Gribeauval among its numbers. "Professor of barricading," was a title honored at the Cafe de Seville, and one that they would willingly have had engraved upon their visiting-cards. Observe that the instruction was only theoretical; doubtless out of respect for the policemen, they could not give entirely practical lessons to the future rioters who formed the ground-work of the business. The master or doctor of civil war could not

go out with them, for instance, and practise in the Rue Drouot. But he had one resource, one way of getting out of it; namely, dominoes. No! you never would believe what a revolutionary appearance these inoffensive mutton-bones took on under the seditious hands of the habitués of the Cafe de Seville. These miniature pavements simulated upon the marble table the subjugation of the most complicated of barricades, with all sorts of bastions, redans, and counterscarps. It was something after the fashion of the small models of war-ships that one sees in marine museums. Any one, not in the secret, would have supposed that the "beards" simply played dominoes. Not at all! They were pursuing a course of technical insurrection. When they roared at the top of their lungs "Five on all sides!" certain players seemed to order a general discharge, and they had a way of saying, "I can not!" which evidently expressed the despair of a combatant who has burned his last cartridge. A "beard" in glasses and a stovepipe hat, who had been refused in his youth at the Ecole Polytechnique, was frightful in the rapidity and mathematical precision with which he added up in three minutes his barricade of dominoes. When this man "blocked the six," you were transported in imagination to the Rue Transnonain, or to the Cloître St. Merry. It was terrible!

As to foreign politics, or the remodelling of the map of Europe, it was, properly speaking, only sport and recreation to the "beards." It added interest to the game, that was all. Is it not agreeable, when you are preparing a discard, at the decisive moment, with one hundred at piquet, which gives you 'quinte' or 'quatorze', to deliver unhappy Poland; and when one has the satisfaction to score a king and take every trick, what does it cost to let the Russians enter Constantinople?

Nevertheless, some of the most solemn "beards" of the Cafe de Seville attached themselves to international questions, to the great problem of European equilibrium. One of the most profound of these diplomats--who probably had nothing to buy suspenders with, for his shirt always hung out between his waistcoat and trousers--was persuaded that an indemnity of two million francs would suffice to obtain from the Pope the transfer of Rome to the Italians; and another Metternich on a small scale assumed for his specialty the business of offering a serious affront to England and threatening her, if she did not listen to his advice, with a loss in a short time of her Indian Empire and other colonial possessions.

Thus the "beards," absorbed by such grave speculations, did not trouble themselves about the vanity called literature, and did not care a pin for Amedee Violette's book. Among the long-haired ones, however, we repeat, the emotion was great. They were furious, they were agitated, and bristled up; the first enthusiasm over Amedee Violette's verses could not be lasting and had been only a mere flash. The young man saw these Merovingians as they really were toward a man who succeeded, that is, severe almost to cruelty. What! the first edition of Poems from Nature was exhausted and Massif had another in press! What! the bourgeoisie, far from being "astonished" at this book, declared themselves delighted with it, bought it, read it, and perhaps had it rebound! They spoke favorably of it in all the bourgeois journals, that is to say, in those that had subscribers! Did they not say that Violette, incited by Jocquelet, was working at a grand comedy in verse, and that the Theatre-

Francais had made very flattering offers to the poet? But then, if he pleased the bourgeoisie so much he was--oh, horror!--a bourgeois himself. That was obvious. How blind they had been not to see it sooner! When Amedee had read his verses not long since at Sillery's, by what aberration had they confounded this platitude with simplicity, this whining with sincere emotion, these stage tricks with art? Ah! you may rest assured, they never will be caught again!

As the poets' tables at the Cafe de Seville had been for some time transformed into beds of torture upon which Amedee Violette's poems were stretched out and racked every day from five to seven, the amiable Paul Sillery, with a jeering smile upon his lips, tried occasionally to cry pity for his friend's verses, given up to such ferocious executioners. But these literary murderers, ready to destroy a comrade's book, are more pitiless than the Inquisition. There were two inquisitors more relentless than the others; first, the little scrubby fellow who claimed for his share all the hours of a Mussulman's palace; another, the great elegist from the provinces. Truly, his heartaches must have made him gain flesh, for very soon he was obliged to let out the strap on his waistcoat.

Of course, when Amedee appeared, the conversation was immediately changed, and they began to talk of insignificant things that they had read in the journals; for example, the fire-damp, which had killed twenty-five working-men in a mine, in a department of the north; or of the shipwreck of a transatlantic steamer in which everything was lost, with one hundred and fifty passengers and forty sailors--events of no importance, we must admit, if one compares them to the recent discovery made by the poet inquisitors of two incorrect phrases and five weak rhymes in their comrade's work.

Amedee's sensitive nature soon remarked the secret hostility of which he was the object in this group of poets, and he now came to the Cafe de Seville only on rare occasions, in order to take Paul Sillery by the hand, who, in spite of his ironical air, had always shown himself a good and faithful friend.

It was there that he recognized one evening his classmate of the Lycee, Arthur Papillon, seated at one of the political tables. The poet wondered to himself how this fine lawyer, with his temperate opinions, happened to be among these hot-headed revolutionists, and what interest in common could unite this correct pair of blond whiskers to the uncultivated, bushy ones. Papillon, as soon as he saw Amedee, took leave of the group with whom he was talking and came and offered his hearty congratulations to the author of Poems from Nature, leading him out upon the boulevard and giving him the key to the mystery.

All the old parties were united against the Empire, in view of the coming elections; Orleanists and Republicans were, for the time being, close friends. He, Papillon, had just taken his degree, and had attached himself to the fortunes of an old wreck of the July government; who, having rested in oblivion since 1852, had consented to run as candidate for the Liberal opposition in Seine-et-Oise. Papillon was flying around

like a hen with her head cut off, to make his companion win the day. He came to the Seville to assure himself of the neutral goodwill of the unreconciled journalists, and he was full of hope.

"Oh! my dear friend, how difficult it is to struggle against an official candidate! But our candidate is an astonishing man. He goes about all day upon the railroads in our department, unfolding his programme before the travelling countrymen and changing compartments at each station. What a stroke of genius! a perambulating public assemblage. This idea came to him from seeing a harpist make the trip from Havre to Honfleur, playing 'Il Bacio' all the time. Ah, one must look alive! The prefect does not shrink from any way of fighting us. Did he not spread through one of our most Catholic cantons the report that we were Voltairians, enemies to religion and devourers of priests? Fortunately, we have yet four Sundays before us, from now until the voting-day, and the patron will go to high mass and communion in our four more important parishes. That will be a response! If such a man is not elected, universal suffrage is hopeless!"

Amedee was not at that time so disenchanted with political matters as he became later, and he asked himself with an uneasy feeling whether this model candidate, who was perhaps about to give himself sacrilegious indignation, and who showed his profession of faith as a cutler shows his knives, was not simply a quack.

Arthur Papillon did not give him time to devote himself to such unpleasant reflections, but said to him, in a frank, protecting tone:

"And you, my boy, let us see, where do you stand? You have been very successful, have you not? The other evening at the house of Madame la Comtesse Fontaine, you know--the widow of one of Louis Philippe's ministers and daughter of Marshal Lefievre--Jocquelet recited your 'Sebastopol' with enormous success. What a voice that Jocquelet has! We have not his like at the Paris bar. Fortunate poet! I have seen your book lying about in the boudoir of more than one beautiful woman. Well, I hope that you will leave the Cafe de Seville and not linger with all these badly combed fellows. You must go into society; it is indispensable to a man of letters, and I will present you whenever you wish."

For the time being Amedee's ardor was a little dampened concerning the Bohemians with whom he enjoyed so short a favor, and who had also in many ways shocked his delicacy. He was not desirous to be called "thou" by Pere Lebuffle.

But to go into society! His education had been so modest! Should he know how to appear, how to conduct himself properly? He asked this of Papillon. Our poet was proud, he feared ridicule, and would not consent to play an inferior role anywhere; and then his success just then was entirely platonic. He was still very poor and lived in the Faubourg St.-Jacques. Massif ought to pay him in a few days five hundred francs for the second edition of his book; but what is a handful of napoleons?

"It is enough," said the advocate, who thought of his friend's dress.

"It is all that is necessary to buy fine linen, and a well cut dress-coat, that is the essential thing. Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent. With your fine and yielding nature you will become at once a gentleman; better still, you are not a bad-looking fellow; you have an interesting pallor. I am convinced that you will please. It is now the beginning of July, and Paris is almost empty, but Madame la Comtesse Fontaine does not go away until the vacations, as she is looking after her little son, who is finishing his studies at the Lycee Bonaparte. The Countess's drawing-rooms are open every evening until the end of the month, and one meets there all the chic people who are delayed in Paris, or who stop here between two journeys. Madame Fontaine is a very amiable and influential old lady; she has a fancy for writers when they are good company. Do not be silly, but go and order yourself some evening clothes. By presenting you there, my dear fellow, I assure you, perhaps in fifteen years, a seat in the Academy. It is agreed! Get ready for next week."

Attention! Amedee Violette is about to make his first appearance in society.

Although his concierge, who aided him to finish his toilette and saw him put on his white cravat, had just said to him, "What a love of a husband you would make!" the poet's heart beat rapidly when the carriage in which he was seated beside Arthur Papillon stopped before the steps of an old house in the Rue de Bellechasse, where Madame la Comtesse Fontaine lived.

In the vestibule he tried to imitate the advocate's bearing, which was full of authority; but quickly despaired of knowing how to swell out his starched shirt-front under the severe looks of four tall lackeys in silk stockings. Amedee was as much embarrassed as if he were presented naked before an examining board. But they doubtless found him "good for service," for the door opened into a brightly lighted drawing-room into which he followed Arthur Papillon, like a frail sloop towed in by an imposing three-master, and behold the timid Amedee presented in due form to the mistress of the house! She was a lady of elephantine proportions, in her sixtieth year, and wore a white camellia stuck in her rosewood-colored hair. Her face and arms were plastered with enough flour to make a plate of fritters; but for all that, she had a grand air and superb eyes, whose commanding glance was softened by so kindly a smile that Amedee was a trifle reassured.

She had much applauded M. Violette's beautiful verse, she said, that Jocquelet had recited at her house on the last Thursday of her season; and she had just read with the greatest pleasure his Poems from Nature. She thanked M. Papillon--who bows his head and lets his monocle fall--for having brought M. Violette. She was charmed to make his acquaintance.

Amedee was very much embarrassed to know what to reply to this commonplace compliment which was paid so gracefully. Fortunately he was spared this duty by the arrival of a very much dressed, tall, bony woman, toward whom the Countess darted off with astonishing vivacity,

exclaiming, joyfully: "Madame la Marechale!" and Amedee, still following in the wake of his comrade, sailed along toward the corner of the drawing-room, and then cast anchor before a whole flotilla of black coats. Amedee's spirits began to revive, and he examined the place, so entirely new to him, where his growing reputation had admitted him.

It was a vast drawing-room after the First Empire style, hung and furnished in yellow satin, whose high white panels were decorated with trophies of antique weapons carved in wood and gilded. A dauber from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts would have branded with the epithet "sham" the armchairs and sofas ornamented with sphinx heads in bronze, as well as the massive green marble clock upon which stood, all in gold, a favorite court personage, clothed in a cap, sword, and fig-leaf, who seemed to be making love to a young person in a floating tunic, with her hair dressed exactly like that of the Empress Josephine. But the dauber would have been wrong, for this massive splendor was wanting neither in grandeur nor character. Two pictures only lighted up the cold walls; one, signed by Gros, was an equestrian portrait of the Marshal, Madame Fontaine's father, the old drummer of Pont de Lodi, one of the bravest of Napoleon's lieutenants. He was represented in full-dress uniform, with an enormous black-plumed hat, brandishing his blue velvet baton, sprinkled with golden bees, and under the rearing horse's legs one could see in the dim distance a grand battle in the snow, and mouths of burning cannons. The other picture, placed upon an easel and lighted by a lamp with a reflector, was one of Ingre's the 'chef-d'oeuvres'. It was the portrait of the mistress of the house at the age of eighteen, a portrait of which the Countess was now but an old and horrible caricature.

Arthur Papillon talked in a low voice with Amedee, explaining to him how Madame Fontaine's drawing-room was neutral ground, open to people of all parties. As daughter of a Marshal of the First Empire, the Countess preserved the highest regard for the people at the Tuileries, although she was the widow of Count Fontaine, who was one of the brood of Royer-Collard's conservatives, a parliamentarian ennobled by Louis-Philippe, twice a colleague of Guizot on the ministerial bench, who died of spite and suppressed ambition after '48 and the coup d'etat. Besides, the Countess's brother, the Duc d'Eylau, married, in 1829, one of the greatest heiresses in the Faubourg St. Germain; for his father, the Marshal, whose character did not equal his bravery, attached himself to every government, and carried his candle in the processions on Corpus Christi Day under Charles X, and had ended by being manager of the Invalides at the beginning of the July monarchy. Thanks to this fortunate combination of circumstances, one met several great lords, many Orleanists, a certain number of official persons, and even some republicans of high rank, in this liberal drawing-room, where the Countess, who was an admirable hostess, knew how to attract learned men, writers, artists, and celebrities of all kinds, as well as young and pretty women. As the season was late, the gathering this evening was not large. However, neglecting the unimportant gentlemen whose ancestors had perhaps been fabricated by Pere Issacar, Papillon pointed out to his friend a few celebrities. One, with the badge of the Legion of Honor upon his coat, which looked as if it had come from the stall of an old-clothes man, was Forgerol, the great geologist, the most grasping of

scientific men; Forgerol, rich from his twenty fat sinecures, for whom one of his confreres composed this epitaph in advance: "Here lies Forgerol, in the only place he did not solicit."

That grand old man, with the venerable, shaky head, whose white, silky hair seemed to shed blessings and benedictions, was M. Dussant du Fosse, a philanthropist by profession, honorary president of all charitable works; senator, of course, since he was one of France's peers, and who in a few years after the Prussians had left, and the battles were over, would sink into suspicious affairs and end in the police courts.

That old statesman, whose rough, gray hairs were like brushes for removing cobwebs, a pedant from head to foot, leaning in his favorite attitude against the mantel decorated only with flowers, by his mulish obstinacy contributed much to the fall of the last monarchy. He was respectfully listened to and called "dear master" by a republican orator, whose red-hot convictions began to ooze away, and who, soon after, as minister of the Liberal empire, did his best to hasten the government's downfall.

Although Amedee was of an age to respect these notabilities, whom Papillon pointed out to him with so much deference, they did not impress him so much as certain visitors who belonged to the world of art and letters. In considering them the young man was much surprised and a little saddened at the want of harmony that he discovered between the appearance of the men and the nature of their talents. The poet Leroy des Saules had the haughty attitude and the Apollo face corresponding to the noble and perfect beauty of his verses; but Edouard Durocher, the fashionable painter of the nineteenth century, was a large, common-looking man with a huge moustache, like that of a book agent; and Theophile de Sonis, the elegant story-writer, the worldly romancer, had a copper-colored nose, and his harsh beard was like that of a chief in a custom-house.

What attracted Amedee's attention, above all things, were the women--the fashionable women that he saw close by for the first time. Some of them were old, and horrified him. The jewels with which they were loaded made their fatigued looks, dark-ringed eyes, heavy profiles, thick flabby lips, like a dromedary's, still more distressing; and with their bare necks and arms--it was etiquette at Madame Fontaine's receptions--which allowed one to see through filmy lace their flabby flesh or bony skeletons, they were as ridiculous as an elegant cloak would be upon an old crone.

As he saw these decrepit, painted creatures, the young man felt the respect that he should have for the old leave him. He would look only at the young and beautiful women, those with graceful figures and triumphant smiles upon their lips, flowers in their hair, and diamonds upon their necks. All this bare flesh intimidated Amedee; for he had been brought up so privately and strictly that he was distressed enough to lower his eyes at the sight of so many arms, necks, and shoulders. He thought of Maria Gerard as she looked the other day, when he met her going to work in the Louvre, so pretty in her short high-necked dress, her magnificent

hair flying out from her close bonnet, and her box of pastels in her hand. How much more he preferred this simple rose, concealed among thorns, to all these too full-blown peonies!

Soon the enormous and amiable Countess came to the poet and begged him, to his great confusion, to recite a few verses. He was forced to do it. It was his turn to lean upon the mantel. Fortunately it was a success for him; all the full-blown peonies, who did not understand much of his poetry, thought him a handsome man, with his blue eyes, and their ardent, melancholy glance; and they applauded him as much as they could without bursting their very tight gloves. They surrounded him and complimented him. Madame Fontaine presented him to the poet Leroy des Saules, who congratulated him with the right word, and invited him with a paternal air to come and see him. It would have been a very happy moment for Amedee, if one of the old maids with camel-like lips, whose stockings were probably as blue as her eyelids, had not monopolized him for a quarter of an hour, putting him through a sort of an examination on contemporary poets. At last the poet retired, after receiving a cup of tea and an invitation to dinner for the next Tuesday. Then he was once more seated in the carriage with Arthur Papillon, who gave him a slap on the thigh, exclaiming, joyfully:

"Well, you are launched!"

It was true; he was launched, and he will wear out more than one suit of evening clothes before he learns all that this action "going into society," which seems nothing at all at first, and which really is nothing, implies, to an industrious man and artist, of useless activity and lost time. He is launched! He has made a successful debut! A dinner in the city! At Madame Fontaine's dinner on the next Tuesday, some abominable wine and aged salmon was served to Amedee by a butler named Adolphe, who ought rather to have been called Exili or Castaing, and who, after fifteen years' service to the Countess, already owned two good paying houses in Paris. At the time, however, all went well, for Amedee had a good healthy stomach and could digest buttons from a uniform; but when all the Borgias, in black-silk stockings and white-silk gloves, who wish to become house-owners, have cooked their favorite dishes for him, and have practised only half a dozen winters, two or three times a week upon him, we shall know more as to his digestion. Still that dinner was enjoyable. Beginning with the suspicious salmon, the statesman with the brush-broom head, the one who had overthrown Louis-Philippe without suspecting it, started to explain how, if they had listened to his advice, this constitutional king's dynasty would yet be upon the throne; and at the moment when the wretched butler poured out his most poisonous wine, the old lady who looked like a dromedary with rings in its ears, made Amedee--her unfortunate neighbor--undergo a new oral examination upon the poets of the nineteenth century, and asked him what he thought of Lamartine's clamorous debts, and Victor Hugo's foolish pride, and Alfred de Musset's intemperate habits.

The worthy Amedee is launched! He will go and pay visits of indigestion; appear one day at Madame such a one's, and at the houses of several other "Madames." At first he will stay there a half-hour, the simpleton!

until he sees that the cunning ones only come in and go out exactly as one does in a booth at a fair. He will see pass before him--but this time in corsages of velvet or satin--all the necks and shoulders of his acquaintances, those that he turned away from with disgust and those that made him blush. Each Madame this one, entering Madame that one's house, will seat herself upon the edge of a chair, and will always say the same inevitable thing, the only thing that can be or should be said that day; for example, "So the poor General is dead!" or "Have you heard the new piece at the Francais? It is not very strong, but it is well played!" "This will be delicious;" and Amedee will admire, above all things, Madame this one's play of countenance, when Madame G----- tells her that Madame B-----'s daughter is to marry Madame C-----'s nephew. While she hardly knows these people, she will manifest as lively a joy as if they had announced the death of an old aunt, whose money she is waiting for to renew the furniture in her house. And, on the contrary, when Madame D--- announces that Madame E-----'s little son has the whooping-cough, at once, without transition, by a change of expression that would make the fortune of an actress, the lady of the house puts on an air of consternation, as if the cholera had broken out the night before in the Halles quarter.

Amedee is launched, I repeat it. He is still a little green and will become the dupe, for a long time, of all the shams, grimaces, acting, and false smiles, which cover so many artificial teeth. At first sight all is elegance, harmony, and delicacy. Since Amedee does not know that the Princess Krazinska's celebrated head of hair was cut from the heads of the Breton girls, how could he suspect that the austere defender of the clergy, M. Lemarquillier, had been gravely compromised in a love affair, and had thrown himself at the feet of the chief of police, exclaiming, "Do not ruin me!" When the king of society is announced, the young Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, whose one ancestor was at the battle of the bridge, and who is just now introducing a new style in trousers, Amedee could not suspect that the favorite amusement of this fashionable rake consisted in drinking in the morning upon an empty stomach, with his coachman, at a grog-shop on the corner. When the pretty Baroness des Nenuphars blushed up to her ears because someone spoke the word "tea-spoon" before her, and she considered it to be an unwarrantable indelicacy--nobody knows why--it is assuredly not our young friend who will suspect that, in order to pay the gambling debts of her third lover, this modest person had just sold secretly her family jewels.

Rest assured Amedee will lose all these illusions in time. The day will come when he will not take in earnest this grand comedy in white cravats. He will not have the bad taste to show his indignation. No! he will pity these unfortunate society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood. He will even excuse their whims and vices as he thinks of the frightful ennui that overwhelms them. Yes, he will understand how the unhappy Duc de la Tour-Prends-Garde, who is condemned to hear La Favorita seventeen times during the winter, may feel at times the need of a violent distraction, and go to drink white wine with his servant. Amedee will be full of indulgence, only one must pardon him for his plebeian heart and native uncouthness; for at the moment when he shall have fathomed the emptiness and vanity of this worldly farce, he will keep

all of his sympathy for those who retain something like nature. He will esteem infinitely more the poorest of the workmen--a wood-sawyer or a bell-hanger--than a politician haranguing from the mantel, or an old literary dame who sparkles like a window in the Palais-Royal, and is tattooed like a Caribbean; he will prefer an old; wrinkled, village grand-dame in her white cap, who still hoes, although sixty years old, her little field of potatoes.

CHAPTER XIII

A SERPENT AT THE FIRESIDE

A little more than a year has passed. It is now the first days of October; and when the morning mist is dissipated, the sky is of so limpid a blue and the air so pure and fresh, that Amedee Violette is almost tempted to make a paper kite and fly it over the fortifications, as he did in his youth. But the age for that has passed; Amedee's real kite is more fragile than if it had been made of sticks and pieces of old paper pasted on one over another; it does not ascend very high yet, and the thread that sails it is not very strong. Amedee's kite is his growing reputation. He must work to sustain it; and always with the secret hope of making little Maria his wife. Amedee works. He is not so poor now, since he earns at the ministry two hundred francs a month, and from time to time publishes a prose story in journals where his copy is paid for. He has also left his garret in the Faubourg St.-Jacques and lives on the Ile St. Louis, in one room only, but large and bright, from whose window he can see, as he leans out, the coming and going of boats on the river and the sun as it sets behind Notre-Dame.

Amedee has been working mostly upon his drama, for the Comedie-Francaise this summer, and it is nearly done; it is a modern drama in verse, entitled *L'Atelier*. The action is very simple, like that of a tragedy, but he believes it is sympathetic and touching, and it ends in a popular way. Amedee thinks he has used for his dialogue familiar but nevertheless poetic lines, in which he has not feared to put in certain graphic words and energetic speeches from the mouths of working-people.

The grateful poet has destined the principal role for Jocquelet, who has made a successful debut in the 'Fourberies de Scapin', and who, since then, has won success after success. Jocquelet, like all comic actors, aspires to play also in drama. He can do so in reality, but under particular conditions; for in spite of his grotesque nose, he has strong and spirited qualities, and recites verses very well. He is to represent an old mechanic, in his friend's work, a sort of faubourg Nestor, and this type will accommodate itself very well to the not very aristocratic face of Jocquelet, who more and more proves his cleverness at "making-up." However, at first the actor was not satisfied with his part. He fondles the not well defined dream of all actors, he wishes, like all the others, the "leading part." They do not exactly know what they mean by it, but in their dreams is vaguely visible a wonderful Almanzor, who

makes his first entrance in an open barouche drawn by four horses harnessed a la Daumont, and descends from it dressed in tight-fitting gray clothes, tasselled boots, and decorations. This personage is as attractive as Don Juan, brave as Murat, a poet like Shakespeare, and as charitable as St. Vincent de Paul. He should have, before the end of the first act, crushed with love by one single glance, the young leading actress; dispersed a dozen assassins with his sword; addressed to the stars--that is to say, the spectators in the upper gallery--a long speech of eighty or a hundred lines, and gathered up two lost children under the folds of his cloak.

A "fine leading part" should also, during the rest of the piece, accomplish a certain number of sublime acts, address the multitude from the top of a staircase, insult a powerful monarch to his face, dash into the midst of a conflagration--always in the long-topped boots. The ideal part would be for him to discover America, like Christopher Columbus; win pitched battles, like Bonaparte, or some other equally senseless thing; but the essential point is, never to leave the stage and to talk all the time--the work, in reality, should be a monologue in five acts.

This role of an old workman, offered to Jocquelet by Amedee, obtained only a grimace of displeasure from the actor. However, it ended by his being reconciled to the part, studying it, and, to use his own expression, "racking his brains over it," until one day he ran to Violette's, all excited, exclaiming:

"I have the right idea of my old man now! I will dress him in a tricot waistcoat with ragged sleeves and dirty blue overalls. He is an apprentice, is he not? A fellow with a beard! Very well! in the great scene where they tell him that his son is a thief and he defies the whole of the workmen, he struggles and his clothes are torn open, showing a hairy chest. I am not hairy, but I will make myself so--does that fill the bill? You will see the effect."

While reserving the right to dissuade Jocquelet from making himself up in this way, Amedee carried his manuscript to the director of the Theatre Francais, who asked a little time to look it over, and also promised the young poet that he would read it aloud to the committee.

Amedee is very anxious, although Maurice Roger, to whom he has read the piece, act by act, predicts an enthusiastic acceptance.

The handsome Maurice has been installed for more than a year in a studio on the Rue d'Assas and leads a jolly, free life there. Does he work? Sometimes; by fits and starts. And although he abandons his sketches at the first attack of idleness, there is a charm about these sketches, suspended upon the wall; and he will some day show his talent. One of his greatest pleasures is to see pass before him all his beautiful models, at ten francs an hour. With palette in hand, he talks with the young women, tells them amusing stories, and makes them relate all their love-affairs. When friends come to see him, they can always see a model just disappearing behind a curtain. Amedee prefers to visit his friend on Sunday afternoons, and thus avoid meeting these models; and then, too,

he meets there on that day Arthur Papillon, who paves the way for his political career by pleading lawsuits for the press. Although he is, at heart, only a very moderate Liberalist, this young man, with the very chic side whiskers, defends the most republican of "beards," if it can be called defending; for in spite of his fine oratorical efforts, his clients are regularly favored with the maximum of punishment. But they are all delighted with it, for the title of "political convict" is one very much in demand among the irreconcilables. They are all convinced that the time is near when they will overthrow the Empire, without suspecting, alas! that in order to do that twelve hundred thousand German bayonets will be necessary. The day after the triumph, the month of imprisonment will be taken into account, and St. Pelagie is not the 'carcere duro'. Papillon is cunning and wishes to have a finger in every pie, so he goes to dine once a week with those who owe their sojourn in this easy-going jail to him, and regularly carries them a lobster.

Paul Sillery, who has also made Maurice's acquaintance, loiters in this studio. The amiable Bohemian has not yet paid his bill to Pere Lebuffle, but he has cut his red fleece close to his head, and publishes every Sunday, in the journals, news full of grace and humor. Of course they will never pardon him at the Cafe de Seville; the "long-haired" ones have disowned this traitor who has gone over to the enemy, and is now only a sickening and fetid bourgeois; and if the poetical club were able to enforce its decrees, Paul Sillery, like an apostate Jew in the times of the Inquisition, would have been scourged and burned alive. Paul Sillery does not trouble himself about it, however; and from time to time returns to the "Seville" and treats its members to a bumper all around, which he pays for with the gold of his dishonor. Sometimes Jocquelet appears, with his smooth-shaved face; but only rarely, for he is at present a very busy man and already celebrated. His audacious nose is reproduced in all positions and displayed in photographers' windows, where he has for neighbors the negatives most in demand; for instance, the fatherly and benevolent face of the pope; Pius IX, or the international limbs of Mademoiselle Ketty, the majestic fairy, in tights. The journals, which print Jocquelet's name, treat him sympathetically and conspicuously, and are full of his praises. "He is good to his old aunt," "gives alms," "picked up a lost dog in the street the other evening." An artist such as he, who stamps immortality on all the comic repertory, and takes Moliere under his wing, has no time to go to visit friends, that is understood. However, he still honors Maurice Roger with short visits. He only has time to make all the knickknacks and china on the sideboard tremble with the noise of his terrible voice; only time to tell how, on the night before, in the greenroom, when still clothed in Scapin's striped cloak, he deigned to receive, with the coldest dignity, the compliments of a Royal Highness, or some other person of high rank. A prominent society lady has been dying of love for him the past six months; she occupies stage box Number Six--and then off he goes. Good riddance!

Amedee enjoys himself in his friend's studio, where gay and witty artists come to talk. They laugh and amuse themselves, and this Sunday resting-place is the most agreeable of the hard-working poet's recreations. Amedee prolongs them as long as possible, until at last he is alone with

his friend; then the young men stretch themselves out upon the Turkish cushions, and they talk freely of their hopes, ambitions, and dreams for the future.

Amedee, however, keeps one secret to himself; he never has told of his love for Maria Gerard. Upon his return from Italy the traveller inquired several times for the Gerards, sympathized politely with their misfortune, and wished to be remembered to them through Amedee. The latter had been very reserved in his replies, and Maurice no longer broaches the subject in their conversation. Is it through neglect? After all, he hardly knew the ladies; still, Amedee is not sorry to talk of them no longer with his friend, and it is never without a little embarrassment and unacknowledged jealousy that he replies to Maria when she asks for news of Maurice.

She no longer inquires. The pretty Maria is cross and melancholy, for now they talk only of one thing at the Gerards; it is always the same, the vulgar and cruel thought, obtaining the means to live; and within a short time they have descended a few steps lower on the slippery ladder of poverty. It is not possible to earn enough to feed three mouths with a piano method and a box of pastels--or, at least, it does not hold out. Louise has fewer pupils, and Pere Issacar has lessened his orders. Mamma Gerard, who has become almost an old woman, redoubles her efforts; but they can no longer make both ends meet. Amedee sees it, and how it makes him suffer!

The poor women are proud, and complain as little as possible; but the decay inside this house, already so modest, is manifested in many ways. Two beautiful engravings, the last of their father's souvenirs, had been sold in an hour of extreme want; and one could see, by the clean spots upon the wall, where the frames once hung. Madame Gerard's and her daughters' mourning seemed to grow rusty, and at the Sunday dinner Amedee now brings, instead of a cake, a pastry pie, which sometimes constitutes the entire meal. There is only one bottle of old wine in the cellar, and they drink wine by the pot from the grocer's. Each new detail that proves his friends' distress troubles the sensitive Amedee. Once, having earned ten Louis from some literary work, he took the poor mother aside and forced her to accept one hundred francs. The unfortunate woman, trembling with emotion, while two large tears rolled down her cheeks, admitted that the night before, in order to pay the washerwoman, they had pawned the only clock in the house.

What can he do to assist them, to help them to lead a less terrible life? Ah! if Maria would have it so, they could be married at once, without any other expense than the white dress, as other poor people do; and they would all live together. He has his salary of twenty-four hundred francs, besides a thousand francs that he has earned in other ways. With Louise's lessons this little income would be almost sufficient. Then he would exert himself to sell his writings; he would work hard, and they could manage. Of course it would be quite an undertaking on his part to take all this family under his charge. Children might be born to them. Had he not begun to gain a reputation; had he not a future before him? His piece might be played and meet with success. This would be their

salvation. Oh! the happy life that the four would lead together! Yes, if Maria could love him a little, if he persisted in hoping, if she had the courage, it was the only step to take.

Becoming enthusiastic upon this subject, Amedee decided to submit the question to the excellent Louise, in whom he had perfect confidence, and considered to be goodness and truth personified. Every Thursday, at six o'clock, she left a boarding-school in the Rue de la Rochechouart, where she gave lessons to young ladies in singing. He would go and wait for her as she came out that very evening. And there he met her. Poor Louise! her dress was lamentable; and what a sad countenance! What a tired, distressed look!

"What, you, Amedee!" said she, with a happy smile, as he met her.

"Yes, my dear Louise. Take my arm and let me accompany you part of the way. We will talk as we walk; I have something very serious to say to you, confidentially--important advice to ask of you."

The poet then began to make his confession. He recalled their childhood days in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, when they played together; it was as long ago as that that he had first begun to be charmed by little Maria. As soon as he became a young man he felt that he loved the dear child, and had always cherished the hope that he might inspire her with a tender sentiment and marry her some day. If he had not spoken sooner it was because he was too poor, but he had always loved her, he loved her now, and never should love any other woman. He then explained his plan of life in simple and touching terms; he would become Madame Gerard's son and his dear Louise's brother; the union of their two poverties would become almost comfort. Was it not very simple and reasonable? He was very sure that she would approve of it, and she was wisdom itself and the head of the family.

While he was talking Louise lowered her eyes and looked at her feet. He did not feel that she was trembling violently. Blind, blind Amedee! You do not see, you will never see, that she is the one who loves you! Without hope! she knows that very well; she is older than you, she is not pretty, and she will always be in your eyes an adopted elder sister, who once showed you your alphabet letters with the point of her knitting-needle. She has suspected for a long time your love for Maria; she suffers, but she is resigned to it, and she will help you, the brave girl! But this confession that you make, Maria's name that you murmur into her ear in such loving accents, this dream of happiness in which, in your artless egotism, you reserve for her the role of an old maid who will bring up your children, is cruel, oh! how cruel! They have reached the Boulevard Pigalle; the sun has set; the sky is clear and bright as a turquoise, and the sharp autumn wind detaches the last of the dried leaves from the trees. Amedee is silent, but his anxious glance solicits and waits for Louise's reply.

"Dear Amedee," said she, raising her frank, pure eyes to his face, "you have the most generous and best of hearts. I suspected that you loved Maria, and I would be glad to tell you at once that she loves you, so

that we might hereafter be but one family--but frankly I can not. Although the dear child is a little frivolous, her woman's instinct must suspect your feeling for her, but she has never spoken of it to mamma or to me. Have confidence; I do not see anything that augurs ill for you in that. She is so young and so innocent that she might love you without suspecting it herself. It is very possible, probable even, that your avowal will enlighten her as to the state of her own heart. She will be touched by your love, I am sure, as well as by your devotion to the whole family. I hope, with all my heart, Amedee, that you will succeed; for, I can say it to you, some pleasure must happen in poor Maria's life soon. She has moments of the deepest sadness and attacks of weeping that have made me uneasy for some time. You must have noticed, too, that she is overwhelmed with ennui. I can see that she suffers more than mamma or I, at the hard life that we lead. It is not strange that she feels as she does, for she is pretty and attractive, and made for happiness; and to see the present and the future so sad! How hard it is! You can understand, my friend, how much I desire this marriage to take place. You are so good and noble, you will make Maria happy; but you have said it, I am the one who represents wisdom in our house. Let me have then a few days in which to observe Maria, to obtain her confidence, to discover perhaps a sentiment in her heart of which she is ignorant; and remember that you have a sure and faithful ally in me."

"Take your own time, dear Louise," replied the poet. "I leave everything to you. Whatever you do will be for the best."

He thanked her and they parted at the foot of the Rue Lepic. It was a bitter pleasure for the slighted one to give the young man her poor, deformed, pianist's hand, and to feel that he pressed it with hope and gratitude.

She desired and must urge this marriage. She said this over and over again to herself, as she walked up the steep street, where crowds of people were swarming at the end of their day's work. No! no! Maria did not care for Amedee. Louise was very sure of it; but at all events it was necessary that she should try to snatch her young sister from the discouragements and bad counsel of poverty. Amedee loved her and would know how to make her love him. In order to assure their happiness these two young people must be united. As to herself, what matter! If they had children she would accept in advance her duties as coddling aunt and old godmother. Provided, of course, that Maria would be guided, or, at least, that she would consent. She was so pretty that she was a trifle vain. She was nourishing, perhaps, nobody knew what fancy or vain hope, based upon her beauty and youth. Louise had grave fears. The poor girl, with her thin, bent shoulders wrapped up in an old black shawl, had already forgotten her own grief and only thought of the happiness of others, as she slowly dragged herself up Montmartre Hill. When she reached the butcher's shop in front of the mayor's office, she remembered a request of her mother's; and as is always the case with the poor, a trivial detail is mixed with the drama of life. Louise, without forgetting her thoughts, while sacrificing her own heart, went into the shop and picked out two breaded cutlets and had them done up in brown paper, for their evening's repast.

The day after his conversation with Louise, Amedee felt that distressing impatience that waiting causes nervous people. The day at the office seemed unending, and in order to escape solitude, at five o'clock he went to Maurice's studio, where he had not been for fifteen days. He found him alone, and the young artist also seemed preoccupied. While Amedee congratulated him upon a study placed upon an easel, Maurice walked up and down the room with his hands in his pocket, and eyes upon the floor, making no reply to his friend's compliments. Suddenly he stopped and looking at Amedee said:

"Have you seen the Gerard ladies during the past few days?"

Maurice had not spoken of these ladies for several months, and the poet was a trifle surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "Not later than yesterday I met Mademoiselle Louise."

"And," replied Maurice, in a hesitating manner, "were all the family well?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said the artist, in a strange voice, and he resumed his silent promenade.

Amedee always had a slightly unpleasant sensation when Maurice spoke the name of the Gerards, but this time the suspicious look and singular tone of the young painter, as he inquired about them, made the poet feel genuinely uneasy. He was impressed, above all, by Maurice's simple exclamation, "Ah!" which seemed to him to be enigmatical and mysterious. But nonsense! all this was foolish; his friend's questions were perfectly natural.

"Shall we pass the evening together, my dear Maurice?"

"It is impossible this evening," replied Maurice, still continuing his walk. "A duty--I have an engagement."

Amedee had the feeling that he had come at an unfortunate time, and discreetly took his departure. Maurice had seemed indifferent and less cordial than usual.

"What is the matter with him?" said the poet to himself several times, while dining in the little restaurant in the Latin Quarter. He afterward went to the Comedie Francaise, to kill time, as well as to inquire after his drama of Jocquelet, who played that evening in 'Le Legataire Universel'.

The comedian received him in his dressing-room, being already arrayed in Crispin's long boots and black trousers. He was seated in his shirt-sleeves before his toilet-table, and had just patted over his smooth lips the bristling moustache of this traditional personage. Without

rising, or even saying "Good-day," he cried out to the poet as he recognized him in the mirror.

"No news as to your piece! The manager has not one moment to himself; we are getting ready for the revival of Camaraderie. But we shall be through with it in two days, and then--"

And immediately, talking to hear himself talk, and to exercise his terrible organ, he belched out, like the noise from an opened dam, a torrent of commonplace things. He praised Scribe's works, which they had put on the stage again; he announced that the famous Guillery, his senior in the comedy line, would be execrable in this performance, and would make a bungle of it. He complained of being worried to death by the pursuit of a great lady--"You know, stage box Number Six," and showed, with a conceited gesture, a letter, tossed in among the jars of paint and pomade, which smelled of musk. Then, ascending to subjects of a more elevated order, he scored the politics of the Tuileries, and scornfully exposed the imperial corruption while recognizing that this "poor Badingue," who, three days before, had paid a little compliment to the actor, was of more account than his surroundings.

The poet went home and retired, bewildered by such gossip. When he awoke, the agony of his thoughts about Maria had become still more painful. When should he see Louise again? Would her reply be favorable? In spite of the fine autumn morning his heart was troubled, and he felt that he had no courage. His administrative work had never seemed more loathsome than on that day. His fellow-clerk, an amateur in hunting, had just had two days' absence, and inflicted upon him, in an unmerciful manner, his stories of slaughtered partridges, and dogs who pointed, so wonderfully well, and of course punctuated all this with numerous Pan-Pans! to imitate the report of a double-barrelled gun.

When he left the office Amedee regained his serenity a little; he returned home by the quays, hunting after old books and enjoying the pleasures of a beautiful evening, watching, in the golden sky, around the spires of Ste.-Chapelle, a large flock of swallows assembling for their approaching departure.

At nightfall, after dining, he resolved to baffle his impatience by working all the evening and retouching one act of his drama with which he was not perfectly content. He went to his room, lighted his lamp, and seated himself before his open manuscript. Now, then! to work! He had been silly ever since the night before. Why should he imagine that misfortune was in the air? Do such things as presentiments exist?

Suddenly, three light, but hasty and sharp knocks were struck upon his door. Amedee arose, took his lamp, and opened it. He jumped back--there stood Louise Gerard in her deep mourning!

"You?--At my rooms?--At this hour?--What has happened?"

She entered and dropped into the poet's armchair. While he put the lamp upon the table he noticed that the young girl was as white as wax. Then

she seized his hands and pressing them with all her strength, she said, in a voice unlike her own--a voice hoarse with despair:

"Amedee, I come to you by instinct, as toward our only friend, as to a brother, as to the only man who will be able to help us repair the frightful misfortune which overwhelms us!" She stopped, stifled with emotion.

"A misfortune!" exclaimed the young man. "What misfortune? Maria?"

"Yes! Maria!"

"An accident?--An illness?"

Louise made a rapid gesture with her arm and head which signified: "If it were only that!" With her mouth distorted by a bitter smile and with lowered eyes, talking confusedly, she said:

"Monsieur Maurice Roger--yes--your friend Maurice! A miserable wretch!-- he has deceived and ruined the unhappy child! Oh! what infamy!--and now --now--"

Her deathly pale face flushed and became purple to the roots of her hair.

"Now Maria will become a mother!"

At these words the poet gave a cry like some enraged beast; he reeled, and would have fallen had the table not been near. He sat down on the edge of it, supporting himself with his hands, completely frozen as if from a great chill. Louise, overcome with shame, sat in the armchair, hiding her face in her hands while great tears rolled down between the fingers of her ragged gloves.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Good form consists, above all things, in keeping silent
Intimate friend, whom he has known for about five minutes
My good fellow, you are quite worthless as a man of pleasure
Society people condemned to hypocrisy and falsehood

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of A Romance of Youth, v3
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