

The Firm of Nucingen eBook

The Firm of Nucingen by Honoré de Balzac

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Page 1

TO MADAME ZULMA CARRAUD

To whom, madame, but to you should I inscribe this work; to you whose lofty and candid intellect is a treasury to your friends; to you that are to me not only a whole public, but the most indulgent of sisters as well? Will you deign to accept a token of the friendship of which I am proud? You, and some few souls as noble, will grasp the whole of the thought underlying *The Firm of Nucingen*, appended to *Cesar Birotteau*. Is there not a whole social lesson in the contrast between the two stories?

DeBalzac.

You know how slight the partitions are between the private rooms of fashionable restaurants in Paris; Very's largest room, for instance, is cut in two by a removable screen. This Scene is *not* laid at Very's, but in snug quarters, which for reasons of my own I forbear to specify. We were two, so I will say, like Henri Monnier's Prudhomme, "I should not like to compromise *her!*"

We had remarked the want of solidity in the wall-structure, so we talked with lowered voices as we sat together in the little private room, lingering over the dainty dishes of a dinner exquisite in more senses than one. We had come as far as the roast, however, and still we had no neighbors; no sound came from the next room save the crackling of the fire. But when the clock struck eight, we heard voices and noisy footsteps; the waiters brought candles. Evidently there was a party assembled in the next room, and at the first words I knew at once with whom we had to do—four bold cormorants as ever sprang from the foam on the crests of the ever-rising waves of this present generation—four pleasant young fellows whose existence was problematical, since they were not known to possess either stock or landed estates, yet they lived, and lived well. These ingenious *condottieri* of a modern industrialism, that has come to be the most ruthless of all warfares, leave anxieties to their creditors, and keep the pleasures for themselves. They are careful for nothing, save dress. Still with the courage of the Jean Bart order, that will smoke cigars on a barrel of powder (perhaps by way of keeping up their character), with a quizzing humor that outdoes the minor newspapers, sparing no one, not even themselves; clear-sighted, wary, keen after business, grasping yet open handed, envious yet self-complacent, profound politicians by fits and starts, analyzing everything, guessing everything—not one of these in question as yet had contrived to make his way in the world which they chose for their scene of operations. Only one of the four, indeed, had succeeded in coming as far as the foot of the ladder.

To have money is nothing; the self-made man only finds out all that he lacks after six months of flatteries. Andoche Finot, the self-made man in question, stiff, taciturn, cold, and dull-witted, possessed the sort of spirit which will not shrink from groveling before any creature that may be of use to him, and the cunning to be insolent when he needs a

man no longer. Like one of the grotesque figures in the ballet in *Gustave*, he was a marquis behind, a boor in front. And this high-priest of commerce had a following.



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Emile Blondet, Journalist, with abundance of intellectual power, reckless, brilliant, and indolent, could do anything that he chose, yet he submitted to be exploited with his eyes open. Treacherous or kind upon impulse, a man to love, but not to respect; quick-witted as a *soubrette*, unable to refuse his pen to any one that asked, or his heart to the first that would borrow it, Emile was the most fascinating of those light-of-looks of whom a fantastic modern wit declared that “he liked them better in satin slippers than in boots.”

The third in the party, Couture by name, lived by speculation, grafting one affair upon another to make the gains pay for the losses. He was always between wind and water, keeping himself afloat by his bold, sudden strokes and the nervous energy of his play. Hither and thither he would swim over the vast sea of interests in Paris, in quest of some little isle that should be so far a debatable land that he might abide upon it. Clearly Couture was not in his proper place.

As for the fourth and most malicious personage, his name will be enough—it was Bixiou! Not (alas!) the Bixiou of 1825, but the Bixiou of 1836, a misanthropic buffoon, acknowledged supreme, by reason of his energetic and caustic wit; a very fiend let loose now that he saw how he had squandered his intellect in pure waste; a Bixiou vexed by the thought that he had not come by his share of the wreckage in the last Revolution; a Bixiou with a kick for every one, like Pierrot at the Funambules. Bixiou had the whole history of his own times at his finger-ends, more particularly its scandalous chronicle, embellished by added waggeries of his own. He sprang like a clown upon everybody's back, only to do his utmost to leave the executioner's brand upon every pair of shoulders.

The first cravings of gluttony satisfied, our neighbors reached the stage at which we also had arrived, to wit, the dessert; and, as we made no sign, they believed that they were alone. Thanks to the champagne, the talk grew confidential as they dallied with the dessert amid the cigar smoke. Yet through it all you felt the influence of the icy *esprit* that leaves the most spontaneous feeling frost-bound and stiff, that checks the most generous inspirations, and gives a sharp ring to the laughter. Their table-talk was full of bitter irony which turns a jest into a sneer; it told of the exhaustion of souls given over to themselves; of lives with no end in view but the satisfaction of self—of egoism induced by these times of peace in which we live. I can think of nothing like it save a pamphlet against mankind at large which Diderot was afraid to publish, a book that bares man's breast simply to expose the plague-sores upon it. We listened to just such a pamphlet as *Rameau's Nephew*, spoken aloud in all good faith, in the course of after-dinner talk in which nothing, not even the point which the speaker wished to carry, was sacred from epigram; nothing taken for granted, nothing built up except on ruins, nothing revered save the sceptic's adopted article of belief—the omnipotence, omniscience, and universal applicability of money.



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After some target practice at the outer circle of their acquaintances, they turned their ill-natured shafts at their intimate friends. With a sign I explained my wish to stay and listen as soon as Bixiou took up his parable, as will shortly be seen. And so we listened to one of those terrific improvisations which won that artist such a name among a certain set of seared and jaded spirits; and often interrupted and resumed though it was, memory serves me as a reporter of it. The opinions expressed and the form of expression lie alike outside the conditions of literature. It was, more properly speaking, a medley of sinister revelations that paint our age, to which indeed no other kind of story should be told; and, besides, I throw all the responsibility upon the principal speaker. The pantomime and the gestures that accompanied Bixiou's changes of voice, as he acted the parts of the various persons, must have been perfect, judging by the applause and admiring comments that broke from his audience of three.

"Then did Rastignac refuse?" asked Blondet, apparently addressing Finot.

"Point-blank."

"But did you threaten him with the newspapers?" asked Bixiou.

"He began to laugh," returned Finot.

"Rastignac is the late lamented de Marsay's direct heir; he will make his way politically as well as socially," commented Blondet.

"But how did he make his money?" asked Couture. "In 1819 both he and the illustrious Bianchon lived in a shabby boarding-house in the Latin Quarter; his people ate roast cockchafers and their own wine so as to send him a hundred francs every month. His father's property was not worth a thousand crowns; he had two sisters and a brother on his hands, and now——"

"Now he has an income of forty thousand livres," continued Finot; "his sisters had a handsome fortune apiece and married into noble families; he leaves his mother a life interest in the property——"

"Even in 1827 I have known him without a penny," said Blondet.

"Oh! in 1827," said Bixiou.

"Well," resumed Finot, "yet to-day, as we see, he is in a fair way to be a Minister, a peer of France—anything that he likes. He broke decently with Delphine three years ago; he will not marry except on good grounds; and he may marry a girl of noble family. The chap had the sense to take up with a wealthy woman."

"My friends, give him the benefit of extenuating circumstances," urged Blondet. "When he escaped the clutches of want, he dropped into the claws of a very clever man."



“You know what Nucingen is,” said Bixiou. “In the early days, Delphine and Rastignac thought him ‘good-natured’; he seemed to regard a wife as a plaything, an ornament in his house. And that very fact showed me that the man was square at the base as well as in height,” added Bixiou. “Nucingen makes no bones about admitting that his wife is his fortune; she is an indispensable chattel, but a wife takes a second place in the high-pressure life of a political leader and great capitalist. He once said in my hearing that Bonaparte had blundered like a bourgeois in his early relations with Josephine; and that after he had had the spirit to use her as a stepping-stone, he had made himself ridiculous by trying to make a companion of her.”



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“Any man of unusual powers is bound to take Oriental views of women,” said Blondet.

“The Baron blended the opinions of East and West in a charming Parisian creed. He abhorred de Marsay; de Marsay was unmanageable, but with Rastignac he was much pleased; he exploited him, though Rastignac was not aware of it. All the burdens of married life were put on him. Rastignac bore the brunt of Delphine’s whims; he escorted her to the Bois de Boulogne; he went with her to the play; and the little politician and great man of to-day spent a good deal of his life at that time in writing dainty notes. Eugene was scolded for little nothings from the first; he was in good spirits when Delphine was cheerful, and drooped when she felt low; he bore the weight of her confidences and her ailments; he gave up his time, the hours of his precious youth, to fill the empty void of that fair Parisian’s idleness. Delphine and he held high councils on the toilettes which went best together; he stood the fire of bad temper and broadsides of pouting fits, while she, by way of trimming the balance, was very nice to the Baron. As for the Baron, he laughed in his sleeve; but whenever he saw that Rastignac was bending under the strain of the burden, he made ‘as if he suspected something,’ and reunited the lovers by a common dread.”

“I can imagine that a wealthy wife would have put Rastignac in the way of a living, and an honorable living, but where did he pick up his fortune?” asked Couture. “A fortune so considerable as his at the present day must come from somewhere; and nobody ever accused him of inventing a good stroke of business.”

“Somebody left it to him,” said Finot.

“Who?” asked Blondet.

“Some fool that he came across,” suggested Couture.

“He did not steal the whole of it, my little dears,” said Bixiou.

“Let not your terrors rise to fever-heat,
Our age is lenient with those who cheat.

Now, I will tell you about the beginnings of his fortune. In the first place, honor to talent! Our friend is not a ‘chap,’ as Finot describes him, but a gentleman in the English sense, who knows the cards and knows the game; whom, moreover, the gallery respects. Rastignac has quite as much intelligence as is needed at a given moment, as if a soldier should make his courage payable at ninety days’ sight, with three witnesses and guarantees. He may seem captious, wrong-headed, inconsequent, vacillating, and without any fixed opinions; but let something serious turn up, some combination to scheme out, he will not scatter himself like Blondet here, who chooses these occasions to look at things from his neighbor’s point of view. Rastignac concentrates himself, pulls himself together, looks for the point to carry by storm, and goes full tilt for it. He charges



like a Murat, breaks squares, pounds away at shareholders, promoters, and the whole shop, and returns, when the breach is made, to his lazy, careless life. Once more he becomes the man of the South, the man of pleasure, the trifling, idle Rastignac. He has earned the right of lying in bed till noon because a crisis never finds him asleep.”



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“So far so good, but just get to his fortune,” said Finot.

“Bixiou will lash that off at a stroke,” replied Blondet. “Rastignac’s fortune was Delphine de Nucingen, a remarkable woman; she combines boldness with foresight.”

“Did she ever lend you money?” inquired Bixiou. Everybody burst out laughing.

“You are mistaken in her,” said Couture, speaking to Blondet; “her cleverness simply consists in making more or less piquant remarks, in loving Rastignac with tedious fidelity, and obeying him blindly. She is a regular Italian.”

“Money apart,” Andoche Finot put in sourly.

“Oh, come, come,” said Bixiou coaxingly; “after what we have just been saying, will you venture to blame poor Rastignac for living at the expense of the firm of Nucingen, for being installed in furnished rooms precisely as La Torpille was once installed by our friend des Lupeaulx? You would sink to the vulgarity of the Rue Saint-Denis! First of all, ‘in the abstract,’ as Royer-Collard says, the question may abide the *Kritik of Pure Reason*; as for the impure reason——”

“There he goes!” said Finot, turning to Blondet.

“But there is reason in what he says,” exclaimed Blondet. “The problem is a very old one; it was the grand secret of the famous duel between La Chataigneraie and Jarnac. It was cast up to Jarnac that he was on good terms with his mother-in-law, who, loving him only too well, equipped him sumptuously. When a thing is so true, it ought not to be said. Out of devotion to Henry II., who permitted himself this slander, La Chataigneraie took it upon himself, and there followed the duel which enriched the French language with the expression *coup de Jarnac*.”

“Oh! does it go so far back? Then it is noble?” said Finot.

“As a proprietor of newspapers and reviews of old standing, you are not bound to know that,” said Blondet.

“There are women,” Bixiou gravely resumed, “and for that matter, men too, who can cut their lives in two and give away but one-half. (Remark how I word my phrase for you in humanitarian language.) For these, all material interests lie without the range of sentiment. They give their time, their life, their honor to a woman, and hold that between themselves it is not the thing to meddle with bits of tissue paper bearing the legend, ‘*Forgery is punishable with death*.’ And equally they will take nothing from a woman. Yes, the whole thing is debased if fusion of interests follows on fusion of souls. This is a doctrine much preached, and very seldom practised.”



“Oh, what rubbish!” cried Blondet. “The Marechal de Richelieu understood something of gallantry, and he settled an allowance of a thousand louis d’or on *Mme. de la Popeliniere* after that affair of the hiding-place behind the hearth. Agnes Sorel, in all simplicity, took her fortune to Charles VII., and the King accepted it. Jacques Coeur kept the crown for France; he was allowed to do it, and woman-like, France was ungrateful.”



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“Gentlemen,” said Bixiou, “a love that does not imply an indissoluble friendship, to my thinking, is momentary libertinage. What sort of entire surrender is it that keeps something back? Between these two diametrically opposed doctrines, the one as profoundly immoral as the other, there is no possible compromise. It seems to me that any shrinking from a complete union is surely due to a belief that the union cannot last, and if so, farewell to illusion. The passion that does not believe that it will last for ever is a hideous thing. (Here is pure unadulterated Fenelon for you!) At the same time, those who know the world, the observer, the man of the world, the wearers of irreproachable gloves and ties, the men who do not blush to marry a woman for her money, proclaim the necessity of a complete separation of sentiment and interest. The other sort are lunatics that love and imagine that they and the woman they love are the only two beings in the world; for them millions are dirt; the glove or the camellia flower that She wore is worth millions. If the squandered filthy lucre is never to be found again in their possession, you find the remains of floral relics hoarded in dainty cedar-wood boxes. They cannot distinguish themselves one from the other; for them there is no ‘I’ left. *Thou*—that is their Word made flesh. What can you do? Can you stop the course of this ‘hidden disease of the heart’? There are fools that love without calculation and wise men that calculate while they love.”

“To my thinking Bixiou is sublime,” cried Blondet. “What does Finot say to it?”

“Anywhere else,” said Finot, drawing himself up in his cravat, “anywhere else, I should say, with the ‘gentlemen’; but here, I think——”

“With the scoundrelly scapegraces with whom you have the honor to associate?” said Bixiou.

“Upon my word, yes.”

“And you?” asked Bixiou, turning to Couture.

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried Couture. “The woman that will not make a stepping-stone of her body, that the man she singles out may reach his goal, is a woman that has no heart except for her own purposes.”

“And you, Blondet?”

“I do not preach, I practise.”

“Very good,” rejoined Bixiou in his most ironical tones. “Rastignac was not of your way of thinking. To take without repaying is detestable, and even rather bad form; but to take that you may render a hundred-fold, like the Lord, is a chivalrous deed. This was Rastignac’s view. He felt profoundly humiliated by his community of interests with Delphine de Nucingen; I can tell you that he regretted it; I have seen him deploring his



position with tears in his eyes. Yes, he shed tears, he did indeed—after supper. Well, now to *our* way of thinking——”

“I say, you are laughing at us,” said Finot.



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“Not the least in the world. We were talking of Rastignac. From your point of view his affliction would be a sign of his corruption; for by that time he was not nearly so much in love with Delphine. What would you have? he felt the prick in his heart, poor fellow. But he was a man of noble descent and profound depravity, whereas we are virtuous artists. So Rastignac meant to enrich Delphine; he was a poor man, she a rich woman. Would you believe it?—he succeeded. Rastignac, who might have fought at need, like Jarnac, went over to the opinion of Henri II. on the strength of his great maxim, ‘There is no such thing as absolute right; there are only circumstances.’ This brings us to the history of his fortune.”

“You might just as well make a start with your story instead of drawing us on to traduce ourselves,” said Blondet with urbane good humor.

“Aha! my boy,” returned Bixiou, administering a little tap to the back of Blondet’s head, “you are making up for lost time over the champagne!”

“Oh! by the sacred name of shareholder, get on with your story!” cried Couture.

“I was within an ace of it,” retorted Bixiou, “but you with your profanity have brought me to the climax.”

“Then, are there shareholders in the tale?” inquired Finot.

“Yes; rich as rich can be—like yours.”

“It seems to me,” Finot began stiffly, “that some consideration is owing to a good fellow to whom you look for a bill for five hundred francs upon occasion——”

“Waiter!” called Bixiou.

“What do you want with the waiter?” asked Blondet.

“I want five hundred francs to repay Finot, so that I can tear up my I. O. U. and set my tongue free.”

“Get on with your story,” said Finot, making believe to laugh.

“I take you all to witness that I am not the property of this insolent fellow, who fancies that my silence is worth no more than five hundred francs. You will never be a minister if you cannot gauge people’s consciences. There, my good Finot,” he added soothingly, “I will get on with my story without personalities, and we shall be quits.”

“Now,” said Couture with a smile, “he will begin to prove for our benefit that Nucingen made Rastignac’s fortune.”



“You are not so far out as you think,” returned Bixiou. “You do not know what Nucingen is, financially speaking.”

“Do you know so much as a word as to his beginnings?” asked Blondet.

“I have only known him in his own house,” said Bixiou, “but we may have seen each other in the street in the old days.”



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“The prosperity of the firm of Nucingen is one of the most extraordinary things seen in our days,” began Blondet. “In 1804 Nucingen’s name was scarcely known. At that time bankers would have shuddered at the idea of three hundred thousand francs’ worth of his acceptances in the market. The great capitalist felt his inferiority. How was he to get known? He suspended payment. Good! Every market rang with a name hitherto only known in Strasbourg and the Quartier Poissonniere. He issued deposit certificates to his creditors, and resumed payment; forthwith people grew accustomed to his paper all over France. Then an unheard-of-thing happened—his paper revived, was in demand, and rose in value. Nucingen’s paper was much inquired for. The year 1815 arrives, my banker calls in his capital, buys up Government stock before the battle of Waterloo, suspends payment again in the thick of the crisis, and meets his engagements with shares in the Wortschin mines, which he himself issued at twenty per cent more than he gave for them! Yes, gentlemen!—He took a hundred and fifty thousand bottles of champagne of Grandet to cover himself (forseeing the failure of the virtuous parent of the present Comte d’Aubriion), and as much Bordeaux wine of Duberghe at the same time. Those three hundred thousand bottles which he took over (and took at thirty sous apiece, my dear boy) he supplied at the price of six francs per bottle to the Allies in the Palais Royal during the foreign occupation, between 1817 and 1819. Nucingen’s name and his paper acquired a European celebrity. The illustrious Baron, so far from being engulfed like others, rose the higher for calamities. Twice his arrangements had paid holders of his paper uncommonly well; *he* try to swindle them? Impossible. He is supposed to be as honest a man as you will find. When he suspends payment a third time, his paper will circulate in Asia, Mexico, and Australia, among the aborigines. No one but Ouvrard saw through this Alsacien banker, the son of some Jew or other converted by ambition; Ouvrard said, ‘When Nucingen lets gold go, you may be sure that it is to catch diamonds.’”

“His crony, du Tillet, is just such another,” said Finot. “And, mind you, that of birth du Tillet has just precisely as much as is necessary to exist; the chap had not a farthing in 1814, and you see what he is now; and he has done something that none of us has managed to do (I am not speaking of you, Couture), he has had friends instead of enemies. In fact, he has kept his past life so quiet, that unless you rake the sewers you are not likely to find out that he was an assistant in a perfumer’s shop in the Rue Saint Honore, no further back than 1814.”



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“Tut, tut, tut!” said Bixiou, “do not think of comparing Nucingen with a little dabbler like du Tillet, a jackal that gets on in life through his sense of smell. He scents a carcass by instinct, and comes in time to get the best bone. Besides, just look at the two men. The one has a sharp-pointed face like a cat, he is thin and lanky; the other is cubical, fat, heavy as a sack, imperturbable as a diplomatist. Nucingen has a thick, heavy hand, and lynx eyes that never light up; his depths are not in front, but behind; he is inscrutable, you never see what he is making for. Whereas du Tillet’s cunning, as Napoleon said to somebody (I have forgotten the name), is like cotton spun too fine, it breaks.”

“I do not myself see that Nucingen has any advantage over du Tillet,” said Blondet, “unless it is that he has the sense to see that a capitalist ought not to rise higher than a baron’s rank, while du Tillet has a mind to be an Italian count.”

“Blondet—one word, my boy,” put in Couture. “In the first place, Nucingen dared to say that honesty is simply a question of appearances; and secondly, to know him well you must be in business yourself. With him banking is but a single department, and a very small one; he holds Government contracts for wines, wools, indigos —anything, in short, on which any profit can be made. He has an all-round genius. The elephant of finance would contract to deliver votes on a division, or the Greeks to the Turks. For him business means the sum-total of varieties; as Cousin would say, the unity of specialties. Looked at in this way, banking becomes a kind of statecraft in itself, requiring a powerful head; and a man thoroughly tempered is drawn on to set himself above the laws of a morality that cramps him.”

“Right, my son,” said Blondet; “but we, and we alone, can comprehend that this means bringing war into the financial world. A banker is a conquering general making sacrifices on a tremendous scale to gain ends that no one perceives; his soldiers are private people’s interests. He has stratagems to plan out, partisans to bring into the field, ambushes to set, towns to take. Most men of this stamp are so close upon the borders of politics, that in the end they are drawn into public life, and thereby lose their fortunes. The firm of Necker, for instance, was ruined in this way; the famous Samuel Bernard was all but ruined. Some great capitalist in every age makes a colossal fortune, and leaves behind him neither fortune nor a family; there was the firm of Paris Brothers, for instance, that helped to pull down Law; there was Law himself (beside whom other promoters of companies are but pigmies); there was Bouret and Beaujon—none of them left any representative. Finance, like Time, devours its own children. If the banker is to perpetuate himself, he must found a noble house, a dynasty; like the Fuggers of Antwerp, that lent money to Charles V. and were created Princes of Babenhausen, a family



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that exists at this day—in the *Almanach de Gotha*. The instinct of self-preservation, working it may be unconsciously, leads the banker to seek a title. Jacques Coeur was the founder of the great noble house of Noirmoutier, extinct in the reign of Louis XIII. What power that man had! He was ruined for making a legitimate king; and he died, prince of an island in the Archipelago, where he built a magnificent cathedral.”

“Oh! you are giving us an historical lecture, we are wandering away from the present, the crown has no right of conferring nobility, and barons and counts are made with closed doors; more is the pity!” said Finot.

“You regret the times of the *savonnette a vilain*, when you could buy an office that ennobled?” asked Bixiou. “You are right. *Je reviens a nos moutons*.—Do you know Beaudenord? No? no? no? Ah, well! See how all things pass away! Poor fellow, ten years ago he was the flower of dandyism; and now, so thoroughly absorbed that you no more know him than Finot just now knew the origin of the expression ‘*coup de Jarnac*’—I repeat that simply for the sake of illustration, and not to tease you, Finot. Well, it is a fact, he belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

“Beaudenord is the first pigeon that I will bring on the scene. And, in the first place, his name was Godefroid de Beaudenord; neither Finot, nor Blondet, nor Couture, nor I am likely to undervalue such an advantage as that! After a ball, when a score of pretty women stand behooded waiting for their carriages, with their husbands and adorers at their sides, Beaudenord could hear his people called without a pang of mortification. In the second place, he rejoiced in the full complement of limbs; he was whole and sound, had no mote in his eyes, no false hair, no artificial calves; he was neither knock-kneed nor bandy-legged, his dorsal column was straight, his waist slender, his hands white and shapely. His hair was black; he was of a complexion neither too pink, like a grocer’s assistant, nor yet too brown, like a Calabrese. Finally, and this is an essential point, Beaudenord was not too handsome, like some of our friends that look rather too much of professional beauties to be anything else; but no more of that; we have said it, it is shocking! Well, he was a crack shot, and sat a horse to admiration; he had fought a duel for a trifle, and had not killed his man.

“If you wish to know in what pure, complete, and unadulterated happiness consists in this Nineteenth Century in Paris—the happiness, that is to say, of a young man of twenty-six—do you realize that you must enter into the infinitely small details of existence? Beaudenord’s bootmaker had precisely hit off his style of foot; he was well shod; his tailor loved to clothe him. Godefroid neither rolled his r’s, nor lapsed into Normanisms nor Gascon; he spoke pure and correct French, and tied his cravat correctly (like Finot). He had neither father nor mother—such luck



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had he!—and his guardian was the Marquis d’Aiglemont, his cousin by marriage. He could go among city people as he chose, and the Faubourg Saint-Germain could make no objection; for, fortunately, a young bachelor is allowed to make his own pleasure his sole rule of life, he is at liberty to betake himself wherever amusement is to be found, and to shun the gloomy places where cares flourish and multiply. Finally, he had been vaccinated (you know what I mean, Blondet).

“And yet, in spite of all these virtues,” continued Bixiou, “he might very well have been a very unhappy young man. Eh! eh! that word happiness, unhappily, seems to us to mean something absolute, a delusion which sets so many wiseacres inquiring what happiness is. A very clever woman said that ‘Happiness was where you chose to put it.’”

“She formulated a dismal truth,” said Blondet.

“And a moral,” added Finot.

“Double distilled,” said Blondet. “Happiness, like Good, like Evil, is relative. Wherefore La Fontaine used to hope that in the course of time the damned would feel as much at home in hell as a fish in water.”

“La Fontaine’s sayings are known in Philistia!” put in Bixiou.

“Happiness at six-and-twenty in Paris is not the happiness of six-and-twenty at—say Blois,” continued Blondet, taking no notice of the interruption. “And those that proceed from this text to rail at the instability of opinion are either knaves or fools for their pains. Modern medicine, which passed (it is its fairest title to glory) from a hypothetical to a positive science, through the influence of the great analytical school of Paris, has proved beyond a doubt that a man is periodically renewed throughout——”

“New haft, new blade, like Jeannot’s knife, and yet you think that he is still the same man,” broke in Bixiou. “So there are several lozenges in the harlequin’s coat that we call happiness; and—well, there was neither hole nor stain in this Godefroid’s costume. A young man of six-and-twenty, who would be happy in love, who would be loved, that is to say, not for his blossoming youth, nor for his wit, nor for his figure, but spontaneously, and not even merely in return for his own love; a young man, I say, who has found love in the abstract, to quote Royer-Collard, might yet very possibly find never a farthing in the purse which She, loving and beloved, embroidered for him; he might owe rent to his landlord; he might be unable to pay the bootmaker before mentioned; his very tailor, like France herself, might at last show signs of disaffection. In short, he might have love and yet be poor. And poverty spoils a young man’s happiness, unless he holds our transcendental views of the fusion of interests. I know



nothing more wearing than happiness within combined with adversity without. It is as if you had one leg freezing in the draught from the door, and the other half-roasted by a brazier—as I have at this moment. I hope to be understood. Comes there an echo from thy waistcoat-pocket, Blondet? Between ourselves, let the heart alone, it spoils the intellect.



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“Let us resume. Godefroid de Beaudenord was respected by his tradespeople, for they were paid with tolerable regularity. The witty woman before quoted—I cannot give her name, for she is still living, thanks to her want of heart——”

“Who is this?”

“The Marquise d’Espard. She said that a young man ought to live on an entresol; there should be no sign of domesticity about the place; no cook, no kitchen, an old manservant to wait upon him, and no pretence of permanence. In her opinion, any other sort of establishment is bad form. Godefroid de Beaudenord, faithful to this programme, lodged on an entresol on the Quai Malaquais; he had, however, been obliged to have this much in common with married couples, he had put a bedstead in his room, though for that matter it was so narrow that he seldom slept in it. An Englishwoman might have visited his rooms and found nothing ‘improper’ there. Finot, you have yet to learn the great law of the ‘Improper’ that rules Britain. But, for the sake of the bond between us—that bill for a thousand francs—I will just give you some idea of it. I have been in England myself.—I will give him wit enough for a couple of thousand,” he added in an aside to Blondet.

“In England, Finot, you grow extremely intimate with a woman in the course of an evening, at a ball or wherever it is; next day you meet her in the street and look as though you knew her again—‘improper.’ —At dinner you discover a delightful man beneath your left-hand neighbor’s dresscoat; a clever man; no high mightiness, no constraint, nothing of an Englishman about him. In accordance with the tradition of French breeding, so urbane, so gracious as they are, you address your neighbor—‘improper.’—At a ball you walk up to a pretty woman to ask her to dance—‘improper.’ You wax enthusiastic, you argue, laugh, and give yourself out, you fling yourself heart and soul into the conversation, you give expression to your real feelings, you play when you are at the card-table, chat while you chat, eat while you eat —‘improper! improper! improper!’ Stendhal, one of the cleverest and profoundest minds of the age, hit off the ‘improper’ excellently well when he said that such-and-such a British peer did not dare to cross his legs when he sat alone before his own hearth for fear of being improper. An English gentlewoman, were she one of the rabid ‘Saints’ —that most straitest sect of Protestants that would leave their whole family to starve if the said family did anything ‘improper’—may play the deuce’s own delight in her own bedroom, and need not be ‘improper,’ but she would look on herself as lost if she received a visit from a man of her acquaintance in the aforesaid room. Thanks to propriety, London and its inhabitants will be found petrified some of these days.”

“And to think that there are asses here in France that want to import the solemn tomfoolery that the English keep up among themselves with that admirable self-possession which you know!” added Blondet. “It is enough to make any man shudder if he has seen the English at home, and recollects the charming, gracious French manners. Sir Walter Scott was afraid to paint women as they are for fear of being

'improper'; and at the close of his life repented of the creation of the great character of Effie in *The Heart of Midlothian*."



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“Do you wish not to be ‘improper’ in England?” asked Bixiou, addressing Finot.

“Well?”

“Go to the Tuileries and look at a figure there, something like a fireman carved in marble (‘Themistocles,’ the statuary calls it), try to walk like the Commandant’s statue, and you will never be ‘improper.’ It was through strict observance of the great law of the *improper* that Godefroid’s happiness became complete. There is the story:

“Beaudenord had a tiger, not a ‘groom,’ as they write that know nothing of society. The tiger, a diminutive Irish page called Paddy, Toby, Joby (which you please), was three feet in height by twenty inches in breadth, a weasel-faced infant, with nerves of steel tempered in fire-water, and agile as a squirrel. He drove a landau with a skill never yet at fault in London or Paris. He had a lizard’s eye, as sharp as my own, and he could mount a horse like the elder Franconi. With the rosy cheeks and yellow hair of one of Rubens’ Madonnas he was double-faced as a prince, and as knowing as an old attorney; in short, at the age of ten he was nothing more nor less than a blossom of depravity, gambling and swearing, partial to jam and punch, pert as a *feuilleton*, impudent and light-fingered as any Paris street-arab. He had been a source of honor and profit to a well-known English lord, for whom he had already won seven hundred thousand francs on the race-course. The aforesaid nobleman set no small store on Toby. His tiger was a curiosity, the very smallest tiger in town. Perched aloft on the back of a thoroughbred, Joby looked like a hawk. Yet—the great man dismissed him. Not for greediness, not for dishonesty, nor murder, nor rudeness to my lady, nor for cutting holes in my lady’s own woman’s pockets, nor because he had been ‘got at’ by some of his master’s rivals on the turf, nor for playing games of a Sunday, nor for bad behavior of any sort or description. Toby might have done all these things, he might even have spoken to milord before milord spoke to him, and his noble master might, perhaps, have pardoned that breach of the law domestic. Milord would have put up with a good deal from Toby; he was very fond of him. Toby could drive a tandem dog-cart, riding on the wheeler, postilion fashion; his legs did not reach the shafts, he looked in fact very much like one of the cherub heads circling about the Eternal Father in old Italian pictures. But an English journalist wrote a delicious description of the little angel, in the course of which he said that Paddy was quite too pretty for a tiger; in fact, he offered to bet that Paddy was a tame tigress. The description, on the heads of it, was calculated to poison minds and end in something ‘improper.’ And the superlative of ‘improper’ is the way to the gallows. Milord’s circumspection was highly approved by my lady.



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“But poor Toby, now that his precise position in insular zoology had been called in question, found himself hopelessly out of place. At that time Godefroid had blossomed out at the French Embassy in London, where he learned the adventures of Toby, Joby, Paddy. Godefroid found the infant weeping over a pot of jam (he had already lost the guineas with which milord gilded his misfortune). Godefroid took possession of him; and so it fell out that on his return among us he brought back with him the sweetest thing in tigers from England. He was known by his tiger—as Couture is known by his waistcoats—and found no difficulty in entering the fraternity of the club yclept to-day the Grammont. He had renounced the diplomatic career; he ceased accordingly to alarm the susceptibilities of the ambitious; and as he had no very dangerous amount of intellect, he was well looked upon everywhere.

“Some of us would feel mortified if we saw only smiling faces wherever we went; we enjoy the sour contortions of envy. Godefroid did not like to be disliked. Every one has his taste. Now for the solid, practical aspects of life!

“The distinguishing feature of his chambers, where I have licked my lips over breakfast more than once, was a mysterious dressing-closet, nicely decorated, and comfortably appointed, with a grate in it and a bath-tub. It gave upon a narrow staircase, the folding doors were noiseless, the locks well oiled, the hinges discreet, the window panes of frosted glass, the curtain impervious to light. While the bedroom was, as it ought to have been, in a fine disorder which would suit the most exacting painter in water-colors; while everything therein was redolent of the Bohemian life of a young man of fashion, the dressing-closet was like a shrine—white, spotless, neat, and warm. There were no draughts from door or window, the carpet had been made soft for bare feet hastily put to the floor in a sudden panic of alarm—which stamps him as your thoroughbred dandy that knows life; for here, in a few moments, he may show himself either a noodle or a master in those little details in which a man’s character is revealed. The Marquise previously quoted—no, it was the Marquise de Rochefide—came out of that dressing-closet in a furious rage, and never went back again. She discovered nothing ‘improper’ in it. Godefroid used to keep a little cupboard full of——”

“Waistcoats?” suggested Finot.

“Come, now, just like you, great Turcaret that you are. (I shall never form that fellow.) Why, no. Full of cakes, and fruit, and dainty little flasks of Malaga and Lunel; an en cas de nuit in Louis Quatorze’s style; anything that can tickle the delicate and well-bred appetite of sixteen quarterings. A knowing old man-servant, very strong in matters veterinary, waited on the horses and groomed Godefroid. He had been with the late M. de Beaudenord, Godefroid’s father, and bore Godefroid an inveterate affection, a kind of heart complaint which has almost disappeared among domestic servants since savings banks were established.



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“All material well-being is based upon arithmetic. You to whom Paris is known down to its very excrescences, will see that Beaudenord must have acquired about seventeen thousand livres per annum; for he paid some seventeen francs of taxes and spent a thousand crowns on his own whims. Well, dear boys, when Godefroid came of age, the Marquis d’Aiglemont submitted to him such an account of his trust as none of us would be likely to give a nephew; Godefroid’s name was inscribed as the owner of eighteen thousand livres of *rentes*, a remnant of his father’s wealth spared by the harrow of the great reduction under the Republic and the hailstorms of Imperial arrears. D’Aiglemont, that upright guardian, also put his ward in possession of some thirty thousand francs of savings invested with the firm of Nucingen; saying with all the charm of a *grand seigneur* and the indulgence of a soldier of the Empire, that he had contrived to put it aside for his ward’s young man’s follies. ‘If you will take my advice, Godefroid,’ added he, ‘instead of squandering the money like a fool, as so many young men do, let it go in follies that will be useful to you afterwards. Take an *attache’s* post at Turin, and then go to Naples, and from Naples to London, and you will be amused and learn something for your money. Afterwards, if you think of a career, the time and the money will not have been thrown away.’ The late lamented d’Aiglemont had more sense than people credited him with, which is more than can be said of some of us.”

“A young fellow that starts with an assured income of eighteen thousand livres at one-and-twenty is lost,” said Couture.

“Unless he is miserly, or very much above the ordinary level,” added Blondet.

“Well, Godefroid sojourned in the four capitals of Italy,” continued Bixiou. “He lived in England and Germany, he spent some little time at St. Petersburg, he ran over Holland but he parted company with the aforesaid thirty thousand francs by living as if he had thirty thousand a year. Everywhere he found the same *supreme de volaille*, the same aspics, and French wines; he heard French spoken wherever he went—in short, he never got away from Paris. He ought, of course, to have tried to deprave his disposition, to fence himself in triple brass, to get rid of his illusions, to learn to hear anything said without a blush, and to master the inmost secrets of the Powers.—Pooh! with a good deal of trouble he equipped himself with four languages—that is to say, he laid in a stock of four words for one idea. Then he came back, and certain tedious dowagers, styled ‘conquests’ abroad, were left disconsolate. Godefroid came back, shy, scarcely formed, a good fellow with a confiding disposition, incapable of saying ill of any one who honored him with an admittance to his house, too staunch to be a diplomatist, altogether he was what we call a thoroughly good fellow.”

“To cut it short, a brat with eighteen thousand livres per annum to drop over the first investment that turns up,” said Couture.



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“That confounded Couture has such a habit of anticipating dividends, that he is anticipating the end of my tale. Where was I? Oh! Beaudenord came back. When he took up his abode on the Quai Malaquais, it came to pass that a thousand francs over and above his needs was altogether insufficient to keep up his share of a box at the Italiens and the Opera properly. When he lost twenty-five or thirty louis at play at one swoop, naturally he paid; when he won, he spent the money; so should we if we were fools enough to be drawn into a bet. Beaudenord, feeling pinched with his eighteen thousand francs, saw the necessity of creating what we to-day call a balance in hand. It was a great notion of his ‘not to get too deep.’ He took counsel of his sometime guardian. ‘The funds are now at par, my dear boy,’ quoth d’Aiglemont; ‘sell out. I have sold mine and my wife’s. Nucingen has all my capital, and is giving me six per cent; do likewise, you will have one per cent the more upon your capital, and with that you will be quite comfortable.’

“In three days’ time our Godefroid was comfortable. His increase of income exactly supplied his superfluities; his material happiness was complete.

“Suppose that it were possible to read the minds of all the young men in Paris at one glance (as, it appears, will be done at the Day of Judgment with all the millions upon millions that have groveled in all spheres, and worn all uniforms or the uniform of nature), and to ask them whether happiness at six-and-twenty is or is not made up of the following items—to wit, to own a saddle-horse and a tilbury, or a cab, with a fresh, rosy-faced Toby Joby Paddy no bigger than your fist, and to hire an unimpeachable brougham for twelve francs an evening; to appear elegantly arrayed, agreeably to the laws that regulate a man’s clothes, at eight o’clock, at noon, four o’clock in the afternoon, and in the evening; to be well received at every embassy, and to cull the short-lived flowers of superficial, cosmopolitan friendships; to be not insufferably handsome, to carry your head, your coat, and your name well; to inhabit a charming little entresol after the pattern of the rooms just described on the Quai Malaquais; to be able to ask a party of friends to dine at the *Rocher de Cancale* without a previous consultation with your trousers’ pocket; never to be pulled up in any rational project by the words, ‘And the money?’ and finally, to be able to renew at pleasure the pink rosettes that adorn the ears of three thoroughbreds and the lining of your hat?

“To such inquiry any ordinary young man (and we ourselves that are not ordinary men) would reply that the happiness is incomplete; that it is like the Madeleine without the altar; that a man must love and be loved, or love without return, or be loved without loving, or love at cross purposes. Now for happiness as a mental condition.



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“In January 1823, after Godefroid de Beaudenord had set foot in the various social circles which it pleased him to enter, and knew his way about in them, and felt himself secure amid these joys, he saw the necessity of a sunshade—the advantage of having a great lady to complain of, instead of chewing the stems of roses bought for fivepence apiece of *Mme. Prevost*, after the manner of the callow youngsters that chirp and cackle in the lobbies of the Opera, like chickens in a coop. In short, he resolved to centre his ideas, his sentiments, his affections upon a woman, *one woman?*—LA PHAMME! Ah!

“At first he conceived the preposterous notion of an unhappy passion, and gyrated for a while about his fair cousin, *Mme. d’Aiglemont*, not perceiving that she had already danced the waltz in Faust with a diplomatist. The year '25 went by, spent in tentatives, in futile flirtations, and an unsuccessful quest. The loving object of which he was in search did not appear. Passion is extremely rare; and in our time as many barriers have been raised against passion in social life as barricades in the streets. In truth, my brothers, the ‘improper’ is gaining upon us, I tell you!

“As we may incur reproach for following on the heels of portrait painters, auctioneers, and fashionable dressmakers, I will not inflict any description upon you of *her* in whom Godefroid recognized the female of his species. Age, nineteen; height, four feet eleven inches; fair hair, eyebrows *idem*, blue eyes, forehead neither high nor low, curved nose, little mouth, short turned-up chin, oval face; distinguishing signs—none. Such was the description on the passport of the beloved object. You will not ask more than the police, or their worships the mayors, of all the towns and communes of France, the gendarmes and the rest of the powers that be? In other respects—I give you my word for it—she was a rough sketch of a Venus dei Medici.

“The first time that Godefroid went to one of the balls for which *Mme. de Nucingen* enjoyed a certain not undeserved reputation, he caught a glimpse of his future lady-love in a quadrille, and was set marveling by that height of four feet eleven inches. The fair hair rippled in a shower of curls about the little girlish head, she looked as fresh as a naiad peeping out through the crystal pane of her stream to take a look at the spring flowers. (This is quite in the modern style, strings of phrases as endless as the macaroni on the table a while ago.) On that ‘eyebrows *idem*’ (no offence to the prefect of police) Parny, that writer of light and playful verse, would have hung half-a-dozen couplets, comparing them very agreeably to Cupid’s bow, at the same time bidding us to observe that the dart was beneath; the said dart, however, was neither very potent nor very penetrating, for as yet it was controlled by the namby-pamby sweetness of a *Mlle. de la Valliere* as depicted on fire-screens, at the moment when she solemnizes her betrothal in the sight of heaven, any solemnization before the registrar being quite out to the question.



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“You know the effect of fair hair and blue eyes in the soft, voluptuous decorous dance? Such a girl does not knock audaciously at your heart, like the dark-haired damsels that seem to say after the fashion of Spanish beggars, ‘Your money or your life; give me five francs or take my contempt!’ These insolent and somewhat dangerous beauties may find favor in the sight of many men, but to my thinking the blonde that has the good fortune to look extremely tender and yielding, while foregoing none of her rights to scold, to tease, to use unmeasured language, to be jealous without grounds, to do anything, in short, that makes woman adorable,—the fair-haired girl, I say, will always be more sure to marry than the ardent brunette. Firewood is dear, you see.

“Isaure, white as an Alsacienne (she first saw the light at Strasbourg, and spoke German with a slight and very agreeable French accent), danced to admiration. Her feet, omitted on the passport, though they really might have found a place there under the heading Distinguishing Signs, were remarkable for their small size, and for that particular something which old-fashioned dancing masters used to call *flic-flac*, a something that put you in mind of *Mlle. Mars*’ agreeable delivery, for all the Muses are sisters, and the dancer and poet alike have their feet upon the earth. Isaure’s feet spoke lightly and swiftly with a clearness and precision which augured well for things of the heart. ‘*Elle a duc flic-flac*,’ was old Marcel’s highest word of praise, and old Marcel was the dancing master that deserved the epithet of ‘the Great.’ People used to say ‘the Great Marcel,’ as they said ‘Frederick the Great,’ and in Frederick’s time.”

“Did Marcel compose any ballets?” inquired Finot.

“Yes, something in the style of *Les Quatre Elements* and *L’Europe galante*.”

“What times they were, when great nobles dressed the dancers!” said Finot.

“Improper!” said Bixiou. “Isaure did not raise herself on the tips of her toes, she stayed on the ground, she swayed in the dance without jerks, and neither more nor less voluptuously than a young lady ought to do. There was a profound philosophy in Marcel’s remark that every age and condition had its dance; a married woman should not dance like a young girl, nor a little jackanapes like a capitalist, nor a soldier like a page; he even went so far as to say that the infantry ought not to dance like the cavalry, and from this point he proceeded to classify the world at large. All these fine distinctions seem very far away.”

“Ah!” said Blondet, “you have set your finger on a great calamity. If Marcel had been properly understood, there would have been no French Revolution.”



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“It had been Godefroid's privilege to run over Europe,” resumed Bixiou, “nor had he neglected his opportunities of making a thorough comparative study of European dancing. Perhaps but for profound diligence in the pursuit of what is usually held to be useless knowledge, he would never have fallen in love with this young lady; as it was, out of the three hundred guests that crowded the handsome rooms in the Rue Saint-Lazare, he alone comprehended the unpublished romance revealed by a garrulous quadrille. People certainly noticed Isaure d'Aldrigger's dancing; but in this present century the cry is 'Skim lightly over the surface, do not lean your weight on it;' so one said (he was a notary's clerk), 'There is a girl that dances uncommonly well;' another (a lady in a turban), 'There is a young lady that dances enchantingly;' and a third (a woman of thirty), 'That little thing is not dancing badly.'—But to return to the great Marcel, let us parody his best known saying with, 'How much there is in an *avant-deux*.'”

“And let us get on a little faster,” said Blondet; “you are maundering.”

“Isaure,” continued Bixiou, looking askance at Blondet, “wore a simple white crepe dress with green ribbons; she had a camellia in her hair, a camellia at her waist, another camellia at her skirt-hem, and a camellia——”

“Come, now! here comes Sancho's three hundred goats.”

“Therein lies all literature, dear boy. *Clarissa* is a masterpiece, there are fourteen volumes of her, and the most wooden-headed playwright would give you the whole of *Clarissa* in a single act. So long as I amuse you, what have you to complain of? That costume was positively lovely. Don't you like camillias? Would you rather have dahlias? No? Very good, chestnuts then, here's for you.” (And probably Bixiou flung a chestnut across the table, for we heard something drop on a plate.)

“I was wrong, I acknowledge it. Go on,” said Blondet.

“I resume. 'Pretty enough to marry, isn't she?' said Rastignac, coming up to Godefroid de Beaudenord, and indicating the little one with the spotless white camellias, every petal intact.

“Rastignac being an intimate friend, Godefroid answered in a low voice, 'Well, so I was thinking. I was saying to myself that instead of enjoying my happiness with fear and trembling at every moment; instead of taking a world of trouble to whisper a word in an inattentive ear, of looking over the house at the Italiens to see if some one wears a red flower or a white in her hair, or watching along the Corso for a gloved hand on a carriage door, as we used to do at Milan; instead of snatching a mouthful of baba like a lackey finishing off a bottle behind a door, or wearing out one's wits with giving and receiving letters like a postman—letters that consist not of a mere couple of tender lines, but expand to five folio volumes to-day and contract to a couple of sheets to-morrow (a tiresome practice); instead of dragging along over the ruts and dodging



behind hedges—it would be better to give way to the adorable passion that Jean-Jacques Rousseau envied, to fall frankly in love with a girl like Isaure, with a view to making her my wife, if upon exchange of sentiments our hearts respond to each other; to be Werther, in short, with a happy ending.'



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“Which is a common weakness,’ returned Rastignac without laughing. ‘Possibly in your place I might plunge into the unspeakable delights of that ascetic course; it possesses the merits of novelty and originality, and it is not very expensive. Your Monna Lisa is sweet, but inane as music for the ballet; I give you warning.’

“Rastignac made this last remark in a way which set Beaudenord thinking that his friend had his own motives for disenchanting him; Beaudenord had not been a diplomatist for nothing; he fancied that Rastignac wanted to cut him out. If a man mistakes his vocation, the false start none the less influences him for the rest of his life. Godefroid was so evidently smitten with *Mlle. Isaure d’Aldrigger*, that Rastignac went off to a tall girl chatting in the card-room. —‘Malvina,’ he said, lowering his voice, ‘your sister has just netted a fish worth eighteen thousand francs a year. He has a name, a manner, and a certain position in the world; keep an eye on them; be careful to gain Isaure’s confidence; and if they philander, do not let her send word to him unless you have seen it first——’

“Towards two o’clock in the morning, Isaure was standing beside a diminutive Shepherdess of the Alps, a little woman of forty, coquettish as a Zerlina. A footman announced that ‘Mme. la Baronne’s carriage stops the way,’ and Godefroid forthwith saw his beautiful maiden out of a German song draw her fantastical mother into the cloakroom, whither Malvina followed them; and (boy that he was) he must needs go to discover into what pot of preserves the infant Joby had fallen, and had the pleasure of watching Isaure and Malvina coaxing that sparkling person, their mamma, into her pelisse, with all the little tender precautions required for a night journey in Paris. Of course, the girls on their side watched Beaudenord out of the corners of their eyes, as well-taught kittens watch a mouse, without seeming to see it at all. With a certain satisfaction Beaudenord noted the bearing, manner, and appearance, of the tall well-gloved Alsacien servant in livery who brought three pairs of fur-lined overshoes for his mistresses.

“Never were two sisters more unlike than Isaure and Malvina. Malvina the elder was tall and dark-haired, Isaure was short and fair, and her features were finely and delicately cut, while her sister’s were vigorous and striking. Isaure was one of those women who reign like queens through their weakness, such a woman as a schoolboy would feel it incumbent upon him to protect; Malvina was the *Andalouse* of Musset’s poem. As the sisters stood together, Isaure looked like a miniature beside a portrait in oils.

“‘She is rich!’ exclaimed Godefroid, going back to Rastignac in the ballroom.

“‘Who?’

“‘That young lady.’



“Oh, Isaure d’Aldrigger? Why, yes. The mother is a widow; Nucingen was once a clerk in her husband’s bank at Strasbourg. Do you want to see them again? Just turn off a compliment for *Mme.* de Restaud; she is giving a ball the day after to-morrow; the Baroness d’Aldrigger and her two daughters will be there. You will have an invitation.’

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“For three days Godefroid beheld Isaure in the camera obscura of his brain—*his* Isaure with her white camellias and the little ways she had with her head—saw her as you see the bright thing on which you have been gazing after your eyes are shut, a picture grown somewhat smaller; a radiant, brightly-colored vision flashing out of a vortex of darkness.”

“Bixiou, you are dropping into phenomena, block us out our pictures,” put in Couture.

“Here you are, gentlemen! Here is the picture you ordered!” (from the tones of Bixiou’s voice, he evidently was posing as a waiter.) “Finot, attention, one has to pull at your mouth as a jarvie pulls at his jade. In Madame Theodora Marguerite Wilhelmine Adolphus (of the firm of Adolphus and Company, Manheim), relict of the late Baron d’Aldrigger, you might expect to find a stout, comfortable German, compact and prudent, with a fair complexion mellowed to the tint of the foam on a pot of beer; and as to virtues, rich in all the patriarchal good qualities that Germany possesses—in romances, that is to say. Well there was not a gray hair in the frisky ringlets that she wore on either side of her face; she was still as fresh and as brightly colored on the cheek-bone as a Nuremberg doll; her eyes were lively and bright; a closely-fitting bodice set off the slenderness of her waist. Her brow and temples were furrowed by a few involuntary wrinkles which, like Ninon, she would fain have banished from her head to her heel, but they persisted in tracing their zigzags in the more conspicuous place. The outlines of the nose had somewhat fallen away, and the tip had reddened, and this was the more awkward because it matched the color on the cheek-bones.

“An only daughter and an heiress, spoilt by her father and mother, spoilt by her husband and the city of Strasbourg, spoilt still by two daughters who worshiped their mother, the Baroness d’Aldrigger indulged a taste for rose color, short petticoats, and a knot of ribbon at the point of the tightly-fitting corselet bodice. Any Parisian meeting the Baroness on the boulevard would smile and condemn her outright; he does not admit any plea of extenuating circumstances, like a modern jury on a case of fratricide. A scoffer is always superficial, and in consequence cruel; the rascal never thinks of throwing the proper share of ridicule on society that made the individual what he is; for Nature only makes dull animals of us, we owe the fool to artificial conditions.”

“The thing that I admire about Bixiou is his completeness,” said Blondet; “whenever he is not gibing at others, he is laughing at himself.”

“I will be even with you for that, Blondet,” returned Bixiou in a significant tone. “If the little Baroness was giddy, careless, selfish, and incapable in practical matters, she was not accountable for her sins; the responsibility is divided between the firm of Adolphus and Company of Manheim and Baron d’Aldrigger with his blind love for his wife. The Baroness was a gentle as a lamb; she had a soft heart that was very readily moved; unluckily, the emotion never lasted long, but it was all the more frequently renewed.



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“When the Baron died, for instance, the Shepherdess all but followed him to the tomb, so violent and sincere was her grief, but—next morning there was green peas at lunch, she was fond of green peas, the delicious green peas calmed the crisis. Her daughters and her servants loved her so blindly that the whole household rejoiced over a circumstance that enabled them to hide the dolorous spectacle of the funeral from the sorrowing Baroness. Isaure and Malvina would not allow their idolized mother to see their tears.

“While the Requiem was chanted, they diverted her thoughts to the choice of mourning dresses. While the coffin was placed in the huge, black and white, wax-besprinkled catafalque that does duty for some three thousand dead in the course of its career—so I was informed by a philosophically-minded mute whom I once consulted on a point over a couple of glasses of *petit blanc*—while an indifferent priest mumbling the office for the dead, do you know what the friends of the departed were saying as, all dressed in black from head to foot, they sat or stood in the church? (Here is the picture you ordered.) Stay, do you see them?

“‘How much do you suppose old d’Aldrigger will leave?’ Desroches asked of Taillefer.—You remember Taillefer that gave us the finest orgy ever known not long before he died?”

“He was in treaty for practice in 1822,” said Couture. “It was a bold thing to do, for he was the son of a poor clerk who never made more than eighteen hundred francs a year, and his mother sold stamped paper. But he worked very hard from 1818 to 1822. He was Derville’s fourth clerk when he came; and in 1819 he was second!”

“Desroches?”

“Yes. Desroches, like the rest of us, once groveled in the poverty of Job. He grew so tired of wearing coats too tight and sleeves too short for him, that he swallowed down the law in desperation and had just bought a bare license. He was a licensed attorney, without a penny, or a client, or any friends beyond our set; and he was bound to pay interest on the purchase-money and the cautionary deposit besides.”

“He used to make me feel as if I had met a tiger escaped from the Jardin des Plantes,” said Couture. “He was lean and red-haired, his eyes were the color of Spanish snuff, and his complexion was harsh. He looked cold and phlegmatic. He was hard upon the widow, pitiless to the orphan, and a terror to his clerks; they were not allowed to waste a minute. Learned, crafty, double-faced, honey-tongued, never flying into a passion, rancorous in his judicial way.”

“But there is goodness in him,” cried Finot; “he is devoted to his friends. The first thing he did was to take Godeschal, Mariette’s brother, as his head-clerk.”



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“At Paris,” said Blondet, “there are attorneys of two shades. There is the honest man attorney; he abides within the province of the law, pushes on his cases, neglects no one, never runs after business, gives his clients his honest opinion, and makes them compromise on doubtful points—he is a Derville, in short. Then there is the starveling attorney, to whom anything seems good provided that he is sure of expenses; he will set, not mountains fighting, for he sells them, but planets; he will work to make the worse appear the better cause, and take advantage of a technical error to win the day for a rogue. If one of these fellows tries one of Maitre Gonin’s tricks once too often, the guild forces him to sell his connection. Desroches, our friend Desroches, understood the full resources of a trade carried on in a beggarly way enough by poor devils; he would buy up causes of men who feared to lose the day; he plunged into chicanery with a fixed determination to make money by it. He was right; he did his business very honestly. He found influence among men in public life by getting them out of awkward complications; there was our dear les Lupeaulx, for instance, whose position was so deeply compromised. And Desroches stood in need of influence; for when he began, he was anything but well looked on at the court, and he who took so much trouble to rectify the errors of his clients was often in trouble himself. See now, Bixiou, to go back to the subject—How came Desroches to be in the church?”

“D’Aldrigger is leaving seven or eight hundred thousand francs,’ Taillefer answered, addressing Desroches.

“Oh, pooh, there is only one man who knows how much *they* are worth,’ put in Werbrust, a friend of the deceased.

“Who?’

“That fat rogue Nucingen; he will go as far as the cemetery; d’Aldrigger was his master once, and out of gratitude he put the old man’s capital into his business.’

“The widow will soon feel a great difference.’

“What do you mean?’

“Well, d’Aldrigger was so fond of his wife. Now, don’t laugh, people are looking at us.’

“Look here comes du Tillet; he is very late. The epistle is just beginning.’

“He will marry the eldest girl in all probability.’

“Is it possible?’ asked Desroches; ‘why, he is tied more than ever to *Mme. Roguin*.’

“*Tied*—he?—You do not know him.’

“Do you know how Nucingen and du Tillet stand?’ asked Desroches.



“‘Like this,’ said Taillefer; ‘Nucingen is just the man to swallow down his old master’s capital, and then to disgorge it.’

“‘Ugh! ugh!’ coughed Werbrust, ‘these churches are confoundedly damp; ugh! ugh! What do you mean by “disgorge it”?’

“‘Well, Nucingen knows that du Tillet has a lot of money; he wants to marry him to Malvina; but du Tillet is shy of Nucingen. To a looker-on, the game is good fun.’



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“What!’ exclaimed Werbrust, ‘is she old enough to marry? How quickly we grow old!’

“Malvina d’Aldrigger is quite twenty years old, my dear fellow. Old d’Aldrigger was married in 1800. He gave some rather fine entertainments in Strasbourg at the time of his wedding, and afterwards when Malvina was born. That was in 1801 at the peace of Amiens, and here are we in the year 1823, Daddy Werbrust! In those days everything was Ossianized; he called his daughter Malvina. Six years afterwards there was a rage for chivalry, *Partant pour la Syrie* —a pack of nonsense—and he christened his second daughter Isaure. She is seventeen. So there are two daughters to marry.’

“The women will not have a penny left in ten years’ time,’ said Werbrust, speaking to Desroches in a confidential tone.

“There is d’Aldrigger’s man-servant, the old fellow bellowing away at the back of the church; he has been with them since the two young ladies were children, and he is capable of anything to keep enough together for them to live upon,’ said Taillefer.

“*Dies iroe!* (from the minor cannons). *Dies illa!* (from the choristers).

“Good-day, Werbrust (from Taillefer), the *Dies iroe* puts me too much in mind of my poor boy.’

“I shall go too; it is too damp in here,’ said Werbrust.

“*In favilla.*

“A few halfpence, kind gentlemen!’ (from the beggars at the door).

“For the expenses of the church!’ (from the beadle, with a rattling clatter of the money-box).

“‘*Amen*’ (from the choristers).

“What did he die of?’ (from a friend).

“He broke a blood-vessel in the heel’ (from an inquisitive wag).

“Who is dead?’ (from a passer-by).

“The President de Montesquieu!’ (from a relative).

“The sacristan to the poor, ‘Get away, all of you; the money for you has been given to us; don’t ask for any more.’”



“Done to the life!” cried Couture. And indeed it seemed to us that we heard all that went on in the church. Bixiou imitated everything, even the shuffling sound of the feet of the men that carried the coffin over the stone floor.

“There are poets and romancers and writers that say many fine things about Parisian manners,” continued Bixiou, “but that is what really happens at a funeral. Ninety-nine out of a hundred that come to pay their respects to some poor devil departed, get together and talk business or pleasure in the middle of the church. To see some poor little touch of real sorrow, you need an impossible combination of circumstances. And, after all, is there such a thing as grief without a thought of self in it?”

“Ugh!” said Blondet. “Nothing is less respected than death; is it that there is nothing less respectable?”

“It is so common!” resumed Bixiou. “When the service was over Nucingen and du Tillet went to the graveside. The old man-servant walked; Nucingen and du Tillet were put at the head of the procession of mourning coaches.—‘Goot, mein goot friend,’ said Nucingen as they turned into the boulevard. ‘It ees a goot time to marry Malfina; you vill be der brodecor off that boor family vat ess in tears; you vill haf ein family, a home off your own; you vill haf a house ready vurnished, und Malfina is truly ein dreashure.’”

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“I seem to hear that old Robert Macaire of a Nucingen himself,” said Finot.

“‘A charming girl,’ said Ferdinand du Tillet in a cool, unenthusiastic tone,” Bixiou continued.

“Just du Tillet himself summed up in a word!” cried Couture.

“‘Those that do not know her may think her plain,’ pursued du Tillet, ‘but she has character, I admit.’

“‘Und ein herz, dot is the pest of die pizness, mein der poy; she vould make you an indelligent und defoted vife. In our beastly pizness, nopody cares to know who lifs or dies; it is a crate plessing gif a mann kann put drust in his vife’s heart. Mein Telvine prouht me more as a million, as you know, but I should gladly gif her for Malfina dot haf not so pig a *dot*.’

“‘But how much has she?’

“‘I do not know precisely; boot she haf somdings.’

“‘Yes, she has a mother with a great liking for rose-color.’ said du Tillet; and with that epigram he cut Nucingen’s diplomatic efforts short.

“After dinner the Baron de Nucingen informed Wilhelmine Adolphus that she had barely four hundred thousand francs deposited with him. The daughter of Adolphus of Manheim, thus reduced to an income of twenty-four thousand livres, lost herself in arithmetical exercises that muddled her wits.

“‘I have *a/ways* had six thousand francs for our dress allowance,’ she said to Malvina. ‘Why, how did your father find money? We shall have nothing now with twenty-four thousand francs; it is destitution! Oh! if my father could see me so come down in the world, it would kill him if he were not dead already! Poor Wilhelmine!’ and she began to cry.

“Malvina, puzzled to know how to comfort her mother, represented to her that she was still young and pretty, that rose-color still became her, that she could continue to go to the Opera and the Bouffons, where *Mme.* de Nucingen had a box. And so with visions of gaieties, dances, music, pretty dresses, and social success, the Baroness was lulled to sleep and pleasant dreams in the blue, silk-curtained bed in the charming room next to the chamber in which Jean Baptiste, Baron d’Aldrigger, had breathed his last but two nights ago.

“Here in a few words is the Baron’s history. During his lifetime that worthy Alsacien accumulated about three millions of francs. In 1800, at the age of thirty-six, in the apogee of a fortune made during the Revolution, he made a marriage partly of ambition,



partly of inclination, with the heiress of the family of Adolphus of Manheim. Wilhelmine, being the idol of her whole family, naturally inherited their wealth after some ten years. Next, d'Aldrigger's fortune being doubled, he was transformed into a Baron by His Majesty, Emperor and King, and forthwith became a fanatical admirer of the great man to whom he owed his title. Wherefore, between 1814 and 1815 he ruined himself by a too serious belief in the sun of Austerlitz. Honest Alsacien as he was, he did not suspend payment, nor did he give his creditors shares in doubtful concerns by way of settlement. He paid everything over the counter, and retired from business, thoroughly deserving Nucingen's comment on his behavior—'Honest but stoobid.'



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“All claims satisfied, there remained to him five hundred thousand francs and certain receipts for sums advanced to that Imperial Government, which had ceased to exist. ‘See vat komms of too much pelief in Nappolion,’ said he, when he had realized all his capital.

“When you have been one of the leading men in a place, how are you to remain in it when your estate has dwindled? D’Aldrigger, like all ruined provincials, removed to Paris, there intrepidly wore the tricolor braces embroidered with Imperial eagles, and lived entirely in Bonapartist circles. His capital he handed over to Nucingen, who gave him eight per cent upon it, and took over the loans to the Imperial Government at a mere sixty per cent of reduction; wherefore d’Aldrigger squeezed Nucingen’s hand and said, ‘I knew dot in you I should find de heart of ein Elzacien.’

“(Nucingen was paid in full through our friend des Lupeaulx.) Well fleeced as d’Aldrigger had been, he still possessed an income of forty-four thousand francs; but his mortification was further complicated by the spleen which lies in wait for the business man so soon as he retires from business. He set himself, noble heart, to sacrifice himself to his wife, now that her fortune was lost, that fortune of which she had allowed herself to be despoiled so easily, after the manner of a girl entirely ignorant of money matters. *Mme.* d’Aldrigger accordingly missed not a single pleasure to which she had been accustomed; any void caused by the loss of Strasbourg acquaintances were speedily filled, and more than filled, with Paris gaieties.

“Even then as now the Nucingens lived at the higher end of financial society, and the Baron de Nucingen made it a point of honor to treat the honest banker well. His disinterested virtue looked well in the Nucingen salon.

“Every winter dipped into d’Aldrigger’s principal, but he did not venture to remonstrate with his pearl of a Wilhelmine. His was the most ingenious unintelligent tenderness in the world. A good man, but a stupid one! ‘What will become of them when I am gone?’ he said, as he lay dying; and when he was left alone for a moment with Wirth, his old man-servant, he struggled for breath to bid him take care of his mistress and her two daughters, as if the one reasonable being in the house was this Alsacien Caleb Balderstone.

“Three years afterwards, in 1826, Isaure was twenty years old, and Malvina still unmarried. Malvina had gone into society, and in course of time discovered for herself how superficial their friendships were, how accurately every one was weighed and appraised. Like most girls that have been ‘well brought up,’ as we say, Malvina had no idea of the mechanism of life, of the importance of money, of the difficulty of obtaining it, of the prices of things. And so, for six years, every lesson that she had learned had been a painful one for her.



“D’Aldrigger’s four hundred thousand francs were carried to the credit of the Baroness’ account with the firm of Nucingen (she was her husband’s creditor for twelve hundred thousand francs under her marriage settlement), and when in any difficulty the Shepherdess of the Alps dipped into her capital as though it were inexhaustible.



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“When our pigeon first advanced towards his dove, Nucingen, knowing the Baroness’ character, must have spoken plainly to Malvina on the financial position. At that time three hundred thousand francs were left; the income of twenty-four thousand francs was reduced to eighteen thousand. Wirth had kept up this state of things for three years! After that confidential interview, Malvina put down the carriage, sold the horses, and dismissed the coachman, without her mother’s knowledge. The furniture, now ten years old, could not be renewed, but it all faded together, and for those that like harmony the effect was not half bad. The Baroness herself, that so well-preserved flower, began to look like the last solitary frost-touched rose on a November bush. I myself watched the slow decline of luxury by half-tones and semi-tones! Frightful, upon my honor! It was my last trouble of the kind; afterwards I said to myself, ‘It is silly to care so much about other people.’ But while I was in civil service, I was fool enough to take a personal interest in the houses where I dined; I used to stand up for them; I would say no ill of them myself; I—oh! I was a child.

“Well, when the ci-devant pearl’s daughter put the state of the case before her, ‘Oh my poor children,’ cried she, ‘who will make my dresses now? I cannot afford new bonnets; I cannot see visitors here nor go out.’—Now by what token do you know that a man is in love?” said Bixiou, interrupting himself. “The question is, whether Beaudenord was genuinely in love with the fair-haired girl.”

“He neglects his interests,” said Couture.

“He changes his shirt three times a day,” opined Blondet; “a man of more than ordinary ability, can he, and ought he, to fall in love?”

“My friends,” resumed Bixiou, with a sentimental air, “there is a kind of man who, when he feels that he is in peril of falling in love, will snap his fingers or fling away his cigar (as the case may be) with a ‘Pooh! there are other women in the world.’ Beware of that man for a dangerous reptile. Still, the Government may employ that citizen somewhere in the Foreign Office. Blondet, I call your attention to the fact that this Godefroid had thrown up diplomacy.”

“Well, he was absorbed,” said Blondet. “Love gives the fool his one chance of growing great.”

“Blondet, Blondet, how is it that we are so poor?” cried Bixiou.

“And why is Finot so rich?” returned Blondet. “I will tell you how it is; there, my son, we understand each other. Come, there is Finot filling up my glass as if I had carried in his firewood. At the end of dinner one ought to sip one’s wine slowly,—Well?”



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“Thou has said. The absorbed Godefroid became fully acquainted with the family—the tall Malvina, the frivolous Baroness, and the little lady of the dance. He became a servant after the most conscientious and restricted fashion. He was not scared away by the cadaverous remains of opulence; not he! by degrees he became accustomed to the threadbare condition of things. It never struck the young man that the green silk damask and white ornaments in the drawing-room needed refurnishing. The curtains, the tea-table, the knick-knacks on the chimney-piece, the rococo chandelier, the Eastern carpet with the pile worn down to the thread, the pianoforte, the little flowered china cups, the fringed serviettes so full of holes that they looked like open work in the Spanish fashion, the green sitting-room with the Baroness’ blue bedroom beyond it,—it was all sacred, all dear to him. It is only your stupid woman with the brilliant beauty that throws heart, brain, and soul into the shade, who can inspire forgetfulness like this; a clever woman never abuses her advantages; she must be small-natured and silly to gain such a hold upon a man. Beaudenord actually loved the solemn old Wirth—he has told me so himself!

“That old rogue regarded his future master with the awe which a good Catholic feels for the Eucharist. Honest Wirth was a kind of Gaspard, a beer-drinking German sheathing his cunning in good-nature, much as a cardinal in the Middle Ages kept his dagger up his sleeve. Wirth saw a husband for Isaure, and accordingly proceeded to surround Godefroid with the mazy circumlocutions of his Alsacien’s geniality, that most adhesive of all known varieties of bird-lime.

“Mme. d’Aldrigger was radically ‘improper.’ She thought love the most natural thing imaginable. When Isaure and Malvina went out together to the Champs Elysees or the Tuileries, where they were sure to meet the young men of their set, she would simply say, ‘A pleasant time to you, dear girls.’ Their friends among men, the only persons who might have slandered the sisters, championed them; for the extraordinary liberty permitted in the d’Aldriggers’ salon made it unique in Paris. Vast wealth could scarcely have procured such evenings, the talk was good on any subject; dress was not insisted upon; you felt so much at home there that you could ask for supper. The sisters corresponded as they pleased, and quietly read their letters by their mother’s side; it never occurred to the Baroness to interfere in any way; the adorable woman gave the girls the full benefits of her selfishness, and in a certain sense selfish persons are the easiest to live with; they hate trouble, and therefore do not trouble other people; they never beset the lives of their fellow-creatures with thorny advice and captious fault-finding; nor do they torment you with the waspish solicitude of excessive affection that must know all things and rule all things——”

“This comes home,” said Blondet, “but my dear fellow, this is not telling a story, this is *blague*——”



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“Blondet, if you were not tipsy, I should really feel hurt! He is the one serious literary character among us; for his benefit, I honor you by treating you like men of taste, I am distilling my tale for you, and now he criticises me! There is no greater proof of intellectual sterility, my friends, than the piling up of facts. *Le Misanthrope*, that supreme comedy, shows us that art consists in the power of building a palace on a needle’s point. The gist of my idea is in the fairy wand which can turn the Desert into an Interlaken in ten seconds (precisely the time required to empty this glass). Would you rather that I fired off at you like a cannon-ball, or a commander-in-chief’s report? We chat and laugh; and this journalist, a bibliophobe when sober, expects me, forsooth, when he is drunk, to teach my tongue to move at the dull jogtrot of a printed book.” (Here he affected to weep.) “Woe unto the French imagination when men fain would blunt the needle points of her pleasant humor! *Dies iroe!* Let us weep for *Candide*. Long live the *Kritik of Pure Reason*, *La Symbolique*, and the systems in five closely packed volumes, printed by Germans, who little suspect that the gist of the matter has been known in Paris since 1750, and crystallized in a few trenchant words—the diamonds of our national thought. Blondet is driving a hearse to his own suicide; Blondet, forsooth! who manufactures newspaper accounts of the last words of all the great men that die without saying anything!”

“Come, get on,” put in Finot.

“It was my intention to explain to you in what the happiness of a man consists when he is not a shareholder (out of compliment to Couture). Well, now, do you not see at what a price Godefroid secured the greatest happiness of a young man’s dreams? He was trying to understand Isaure, by way of making sure that she should understand him. Things which comprehend one another must needs be similar. Infinity and Nothingness, for instance, are like; everything that lies between the two is like neither. Nothingness is stupidity; genius, Infinity. The lovers wrote each other the stupidest letters imaginable, putting down various expressions then in fashion upon bits of scented paper: ‘Angel! Aeolian harp! with thee I shall be complete! There is a heart in my man’s breast! Weak woman, poor me!’ all the latest heart-frippery. It was Godefroid’s wont to stay in a drawing-room for a bare ten minutes; he talked without any pretension to the women in it, and at these times they thought him very clever. In short, judge of his absorption; Joby, his horses and carriages, became secondary interests in his life. He was never happy except in the depths of a snug settee opposite the Baroness, by the dark-green porphyry chimney-piece, watching Isaure, taking tea, and chatting with the little circle of friends that dropped in every evening between eleven and twelve in the Rue Joubert. You could play bouillotte there safely. (I always won.) Isaure sat with one little foot thrust out in its black satin shoe; Godefroid would gaze and gaze, and stay till every one else was gone, and say, ‘Give me your shoe!’ and Isaure would put her little foot on a chair and take it off and give it to him, with a glance, one of those glances that—in short, you understand.



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“At length Godefroid discovered a great mystery in Malvina. Whenever du Tillet knocked at the door, the live red that colored Malvina’s face said ‘Ferdinand!’ When the poor girl’s eyes fell on that two-footed tiger, they lighted up like a brazier fanned by a current of air. When Ferdinand drew her away to the window or a side table, she betrayed her secret infinite joy. It is a rare and wonderful thing to see a woman so much in love that she loses her cunning to be strange, and you can read her heart; as rare (dear me!) in Paris as the Singing Flower in the Indies. But in spite of a friendship dating from the d’Aldrigger’s first appearance at the Nucingens’, Ferdinand did not marry Malvina. Our ferocious friend was not apparently jealous of Desroches, who paid assiduous court to the young lady; Desroches wanted to pay off the rest of the purchase-money due for his connection; Malvina could not well have less than fifty thousand crowns, he thought, and so the lawyer was fain to play the lover. Malvina, deeply humiliated as she was by du Tillet’s carelessness, loved him too well to shut the door upon him. With her, an enthusiastic, highly-wrought, sensitive girl, love sometimes got the better of pride, and pride again overcame wounded love. Our friend Ferdinand, cool and self-possessed, accepted her tenderness, and breathed the atmosphere with the quiet enjoyment of a tiger licking the blood that dyes his throat. He would come to make sure of it with new proofs; he never allowed two days to pass without a visit to the Rue Joubert.

“At that time the rascal possessed something like eighteen hundred thousand francs; money must have weighted very little with him in the question of marriage; and he had not merely been proof against Malvina, he had resisted the Barons de Nucingen and de Rastignac; though both of them had set him galloping at the rate of seventy-five leagues a day, with outriders, regardless of expense, through mazes of their cunning devices—and with never a clue of thread.

“Godefroid could not refrain from saying a word to his future sister-in-law as to her ridiculous position between a banker and an attorney.

“‘You mean to read me a lecture on the subject of Ferdinand,’ she said frankly, ‘to know the secret between us. Dear Godefroid, never mention this again. Ferdinand’s birth, antecedents, and fortune count for nothing in this, so you may think it is something extraordinary.’ A few days afterwards, however, Malvina took Godefroid apart to say, ‘I do not think that Desroches is sincere’ (such is the instinct of love); ‘he would like to marry me, and he is paying court to some tradesman’s daughter as well. I should very much like to know whether I am a second shift, and whether marriage is a matter of money with him.’ The fact was that Desroches, deep as he was, could not make out du Tillet, and was afraid that he might marry Malvina. So the fellow had secured his retreat. His position was intolerable, he was scarcely paying his expenses and interest on the debt. Women understand nothing of these things; for them, love is always a millionaire.”



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“But since neither du Tillet nor Desroches married her; just explain Ferdinand's motive,” said Finot.

“Motive?” repeated Bixiou; “why, this. General Rule: A girl that has once given away her slipper, even if she refused it for ten years, is never married by the man who——”

“Bosh!” interrupted Blondet, “one reason for loving is the fact that one has loved. His motive? Here it is. General Rule: Do not marry as a sergeant when some day you may be Duke of Dantzic and Marshal of France. Now, see what a match du Tillet has made since then. He married one of the Comte de Granville's daughters, into one of the oldest families in the French magistracy.”

“Desroches' mother had a friend, a druggist's wife,” continued Bixiou. “Said druggist had retired with a fat fortune. These druggist folk have absurdly crude notions; by way of giving his daughter a good education, he had sent her to a boarding-school! Well, Matifat meant the girl to marry well, on the strength of two hundred thousand francs, good hard coin with no scent of drugs about it.”

“Florine's Matifat?” asked Blondet.

“Well, yes. Lousteau's Matifat; ours, in fact. The Matifats, even then lost to us, had gone to live in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, as far as may be from the Rue des Lombards, where their money was made. For my own part, I had cultivated those Matifats. While I served my time in the galleys of the law, when I was cooped up for eight hours out of the twenty-four with nincompoops of the first water, I saw queer characters enough to convince myself that all is not dead-level even in obscure places, and that in the flattest inanity you may chance upon an angle. Yes, dear boy, such and such a philistine is to such another as Raphael is to Natoire.

“Mme. Desroches, the widowed mother, had long ago planned this marriage for her son, in spite of a tremendous obstacle which took the shape of one Cochin, Matifat's partner's son, a young clerk in the adult department. M. and Mme. Matifat were of the opinion that an attorney's position ‘gave some guarantee for a wife's happiness,’ to use their own expression; and as for Desroches, he was prepared to fall in with his mother's views in case he could do no better for himself. Wherefore, he kept up his acquaintance with the druggists in the Rue du Cherche-Midi.

“To put another kind of happiness before you, you should have a description of these shopkeepers, male and female. They rejoiced in the possession of a handsome ground floor and a strip of garden; for amusement, they watched a little squirt of water, no bigger than a cornstalk, perpetually rising and falling upon a small round freestone slab in the middle of a basin some six feet across; they would rise early of a morning to see if the plants in the garden had grown in the night; they had nothing to do, they were restless, they dressed for the sake of dressing, bored themselves at the theatre, and

were for ever going to and fro between Paris and Luzarches, where they had a country house. I have dined there.



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“Once they tried to quiz me, Blondet. I told them a long-winded story that lasted from nine o’clock till midnight, one tale inside another. I had just brought my twenty-ninth personage upon the scene (the newspapers have plagiarized with their ‘continued in our next’), when old Matifat, who as host still held out, snored like the rest, after blinking for five minutes. Next day they all complimented me upon the ending of my tale!

“These tradespeople’s society consisted of M. and *Mme.* Cochin, *Mme.* Desroches, and a young Popinot, still in the drug business, who used to bring them news of the Rue des Lombards. (You know him, Finot.) *Mme.* Matifat loved the arts; she bought lithographs, chromo-lithographs, and colored prints,—all the cheapest things she could lay her hands on. The *Sieur* Matifat amused himself by looking into new business speculations, investing a little capital now and again for the sake of the excitement. Florine had cured him of his taste for the Regency style of thing. One saying of his will give you some idea of the depths in my Matifat. ‘*Art thou* going to bed, my nieces?’ he used to say when he wished them good-night, because (as he explained) he was afraid of hurting their feelings with the more formal ‘you.’

“The daughter was a girl with no manner at all. She looked rather like a superior sort of housemaid. She could get through a sonata, she wrote a pretty English hand, knew French grammar and orthography—a complete commercial education, in short. She was impatient enough to be married and leave the paternal roof, finding it as dull at home as a lieutenant finds the nightwatch at sea; at the same time, it should be said that her watch lasted through the whole twenty-four hours. Desroches or Cochin junior, a notary or a lifeguardsman, or a sham English lord,—any husband would have suited her. As she so obviously knew nothing of life, I took pity upon her, I determined to reveal the great secret of it. But, pooh! the Matifats shut their doors on me. The bourgeois and I shall never understand each other.”

“She married General Gouraud,” said Finot.

“In forty-eight hours, Godefroid de Beaudenord, late of the diplomatic corps, saw through the Matifats and their nefarious designs,” resumed Bixiou. “Rastignac happened to be chatting with the frivolous Baroness when Godefroid came in to give his report to Malvina. A word here and there reached his ear; he guessed the matter on foot, more particularly from Malvina’s look of satisfaction that it was as she had suspected. Then Rastignac actually stopped on till two o’clock in the morning. And yet there are those that call him selfish! Beaudenord took his departure when the Baroness went to bed.



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“As soon as Rastignac was left alone with Malvina, he spoke in a fatherly, good-humored fashion. ‘Dear child, please to bear in mind that a poor fellow, heavy with sleep, has been drinking tea to keep himself awake till two o’clock in the morning, all for a chance of saying a solemn word of advice to you—*Marry!* Do not be too particular; do not brood over your feelings; never mind the sordid schemes of men that have one foot here and another in the Matifats’ house; do not stop to think at all: *Marry!*—When a girl marries, it means that the man whom she marries undertakes to maintain her in a more or less good position in life, and at any rate her comfort is assured. I know the world. Girls, mammas, and grandmammas are all of them hypocrites when they fly off into sentiment over a question of marriage. Nobody really thinks of anything but a good position. If a mother marries her daughter well, she says that she has made an excellent bargain.’ Here Rastignac unfolded his theory of marriage, which to his way of thinking is a business arrangement, with a view to making life tolerable; and ended up with, ‘I do not ask to know your secret, Malvina; I know it already. Men talk things over among themselves, just as you women talk after you leave the dinner-table. This is all I have to say: *Marry.* If you do not, remember that I begged you to marry, here, in this room, this evening!’

“There was a certain ring in Rastignac’s voice which compelled, not attention, but reflection. There was something startling in his insistence; something that went, as Rastignac meant that it should, to the quick of Malvina’s intelligence. She thought over the counsel again next day, and vainly asked herself why it had been given.”

Couture broke in. “In all these tops that you have set spinning, I see nothing at all like the beginnings of Rastignac’s fortune,” said he. “You apparently take us for Matifats multiplied by half-a-dozen bottles of champagne.”

“We are just coming to it,” returned Bixiou. “You have followed the course of all the rivulets which make up that forty thousand livres a year which so many people envy. By this time Rastignac held the threads of all these lives in his hand.”

“Desroches, the Matifats, Beaudenord, the d’Aldriggers, d’Aiglemont?”

“Yes, and a hundred others,” assented Bixiou.

“Oh, come now, how?” cried Finot. “I know a few things, but I cannot see a glimpse of an answer to this riddle.”

“Blondet has roughly given you the account of Nucingen’s first two suspensions of payment; now for the third, with full details.—After the peace of 1815, Nucingen grasped an idea which some of us only fully understood later, to wit, that capital is a power only when you are very much richer than other people. In his own mind, he was jealous of the Rothschilds. He had five millions of francs, he wanted ten. He knew a way to make thirty millions with ten, while with five he could only make fifteen.



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So he made up his mind to operate a third suspension of payment. About that time, the great man hit on the idea of indemnifying his creditors with paper of purely fictitious value and keeping their coin. On the market, a great idea of this sort is not expressed in precisely this cut-and-dried way. Such an arrangement consists in giving a lot of grown-up children a small pie in exchange for a gold piece; and, like children of a smaller growth, they prefer the pie to the gold piece, not suspecting that they might have a couple of hundred pies for it.”

“What is this all about, Bixiou?” cried Couture. “Nothing more *bona fide*. Not a week passes but pies are offered to the public for a louis. But who compels the public to take them? Are they not perfectly free to make inquiries?”

“You would rather have it made compulsory to take up shares, would you?” asked Blondet.

“No,” said Finot. “Where would the talent come in?”

“Very good for Finot.”

“Who put him up to it?” asked Couture.

“The fact was,” continued Bixiou, “that Nucingen had twice had the luck to present the public (quite unintentionally) with a pie that turned out to be worth more than the money he received for it. That unlucky good luck gave him qualms of conscience. A course of such luck is fatal to a man in the long run. This time he meant to make no mistake of this sort; he waited ten years for an opportunity of issuing negotiable securities which should seem on the face of it to be worth something, while as a matter of fact——”

“But if you look at banking in that light,” broke in Couture, “no sort of business would be possible. More than one *bona fide* banker, backed up by a *bona fide* government, has induced the hardest-headed men on 'Change to take up stock which is bound to fall within a given time. You have seen better than that. Have you not seen stock created with the concurrence of a government to pay the interest upon older stock, so as to keep things going and tide over the difficulty? These operations were more or less like Nucingen's settlements.”

“The thing may look queer on a small scale,” said Blondet, “but on a large we call it finance. There are high-handed proceedings criminal between man and man that amount to nothing when spread out over any number of men, much as a drop of prussic acid becomes harmless in a pail of water. You take a man's life, you are guillotined. But if, for any political conviction whatsoever, you take five hundred lives, political crimes are respected. You take five thousand francs out of my desk; to the hulks you

go. But with a sop cleverly pushed into the jaws of a thousand speculators, you can cram the stock of any bankrupt republic or monarchy down their throats; even if the loan has been floated, as Couture says, to pay the interest on that very same national debt. Nobody can complain. These are the real principles of the present Golden Age.”

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“When the stage machinery is so huge,” continued Bixiou, “a good many puppets are required. In the first place, Nucingen had purposely and with his eyes open invested his five millions in an American investment, foreseeing that the profits would not come in until it was too late. The firm of Nucingen deliberately emptied its coffers. Any liquidation ought to be brought about naturally. In deposits belonging to private individuals and other investments, the firm possessed about six millions of capital altogether. Among those private individuals was the Baroness d’Aldrigger with her three hundred thousand francs, Beaudenord with four hundred thousand, d’Aiglemont with a million, Matifat with three hundred thousand, Charles Grandet (who married *Mlle.* d’Aubrión) with half a million, and so forth, and so forth.

“Now, if Nucingen had himself brought out a joint-stock company, with the shares of which he proposed to indemnify his creditors after more or less ingenious manoeuvring, he might perhaps have been suspected. He set about it more cunningly than that. He made some one else put up the machinery that was to play the part of the Mississippi scheme in Law’s system. Nucingen can make the longest-headed men work out schemes for him without confiding a word to them; it is his peculiar talent. Nucingen just let fall a hint to du Tillet of the pyramidal, triumphant notion of bringing out a joint-stock enterprise with capital sufficient to pay very high dividends for a time. Tried for the first time, in days when noodles with capital were plentiful, the plan was pretty sure to end in a run upon the shares, and consequently in a profit for the banker that issued them. You must remember that this happened in 1826.

“Du Tillet, struck through he was by an idea both pregnant and ingenious, naturally bethought himself that if the enterprise failed, the blame must fall upon somebody. For which reason, it occurred to him to put forward a figurehead director in charge of his commercial machinery. At this day you know the secret of the firm of Claparon and Company, founded by du Tillet, one of the finest inventions——”

“Yes,” said Blondet, “the responsible editor in business matters, the instigator, and scapegoat; but we know better than that nowadays. We put, ‘Apply at the offices of the Company, such and such a number, such and such a street,’ where the public find a staff of clerks in green caps, about as pleasing to behold as broker’s men.”

“Nucingen,” pursued Bixiou, “had supported the firm of Charles Claparon and Company with all his credit. There were markets in which you might safely put a million francs’ worth of Claparon’s paper. So du Tillet proposed to bring his firm of Claparon to the fore. So said, so done. In 1825 the shareholder was still an unsophisticated being. There was no such thing as cash lying at call. Managing directors did not pledge themselves not to put their own shares upon



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the market; they kept no deposit with the Bank of France; they guaranteed nothing. They did not even condescend to explain to shareholders the exact limits of their liabilities when they informed them that the directors in their goodness, refrained from asking any more than a thousand, or five hundred, or even two hundred and fifty francs. It was not given out that the experiment in *aere publico* was not meant to last for more than seven, five, or even three years, so that shareholders would not have long to wait for the catastrophe. It was in the childhood of the art. Promoters did not even publish the gigantic prospectuses with which they stimulate the imagination, and at the same time make demands for money of all and sundry.”

“That only comes when nobody wishes to part with money,” said Couture.

“In short, there was no competition in investments,” continued Bixiou. “Paper-mache manufacturers, cotton printers, zinc-rollers, theatres, and newspapers as yet did not hurl themselves like hunting dogs upon their quarry—the expiring shareholder. ‘Nice things in shares,’ as Couture says, put thus artlessly before the public, and backed up by the opinions of experts (‘the princes of science’), were negotiated shamefacedly in the silence and shadow of the Bourse. Lynx-eyed speculators used to execute (financially speaking) the air *Calumny* out of *The Barber of Seville*. They went about piano, piano, making known the merits of the concern through the medium of stock-exchange gossip. They could only exploit the victim in his own house, on the Bourse, or in company; so they reached him by means of the skilfully created rumor which grew till it reached a *tutti* of a quotation in four figures——”

“And as we can say anything among ourselves,” said Couture, “I will go back to the last subject.”

“*Vous etes orfevre, Monsieur Josse!*” cried Finot.

“Finot will always be classic, constitutional, and pedantic,” commented Blondet.

“Yes,” rejoined Couture, on whose account Cerizet had just been condemned on a criminal charge. “I maintain that the new way is infinitely less fraudulent, less ruinous, more straightforward than the old. Publicity means time for reflection and inquiry. If here and there a shareholder is taken in, he has himself to blame, nobody sells him a pig in a poke. The manufacturing industry——”

“Ah!” exclaimed Bixiou, “here comes industry——”

“—— is a gainer by it,” continued Couture, taking no notice of the interruption. “Every government that meddles with commerce and cannot leave it free, sets about an expensive piece of folly; State interference ends in a *maximum* or a monopoly. To my

thinking, few things can be more in conformity with the principles of free trade than joint-stock companies. State interference means that you try to regulate the relations of principal and interest, which is absurd. In business, generally



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speaking, the profits are in proportion to the risks. What does it matter to the State how money is set circulating, provided that it is always in circulation? What does it matter who is rich or who is poor, provided that there is a constant quantity of rich people to be taxed? Joint-stock companies, limited liability companies, every sort of enterprise that pays a dividend, has been carried on for twenty years in England, commercially the first country in the world. Nothing passes unchallenged there; the Houses of Parliament hatch some twelve hundred laws every session, yet no member of Parliament has ever yet raised an objection to the system——”

“A cure for plethora of the strong box. Purely vegetable remedy,” put in Bixiou, “*les carottes*” (gambling speculation).

“Look here!” cried Couture, firing up at this. “You have ten thousand francs. You invest it in ten shares of a thousand francs each in ten different enterprises. You are swindled nine times out of the ten—as a matter of fact you are not, the public is a match for anybody, but say that you are swindled, and only one affair turns out well (by accident!—oh, granted!—it was not done on purpose—there, chaff away!). Very well, the punter that has the sense to divide up his stakes in this way hits on a splendid investment, like those who took shares in the Wortschin mines. Gentlemen, let us admit among ourselves that those who call out are hypocrites, desperately vexed because they have no good ideas of their own, and neither power to advertise nor skill to exploit a business. You will not have long to wait for proof. In a very short time you will see the aristocracy, the court, and public men descend into speculation in serried columns; you will see that their claws are longer, their morality more crooked than ours, while they have not our good points. What a head a man must have if he has to found a business in times when the shareholder is as covetous and keen as the inventor! What a great magnetizer must he be that can create a Claparon and hit upon expedients never tried before! Do you know the moral of it all? Our age is no better than we are; we live in an era of greed; no one troubles himself about the intrinsic value of a thing if he can only make a profit on it by selling it to somebody else; so he passes it on to his neighbor. The shareholder that thinks he sees a chance of making money is just as covetous as the founder that offers him the opportunity of making it.”

“Isn’t he fine, our Couture? Isn’t he fine?” exclaimed Bixiou, turning to Blondet. “He will ask us next to erect statues to him as a benefactor of the species.”

“It would lead people to conclude that the fool’s money is the wise man’s patrimony by divine right,” said Blondet.

“Gentlemen,” cried Couture, “let us have our laugh out here to make up for all the times when we must listen gravely to solemn nonsense justifying laws passed on the spur of the moment.”



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“He is right,” said Blondet. “What times we live in, gentlemen! When the fire of intelligence appears among us, it is promptly quenched by haphazard legislation. Almost all our lawgivers come up from little parishes where they studied human nature through the medium of the newspapers; forthwith they shut down the safety-valve, and when the machinery blows up there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! We do nothing nowadays but pass penal laws and levy taxes. Will you have the sum of it all!—There is no religion left in the State!”

“Oh, bravo, Blondet!” cried Bixiou, “thou hast set thy finger on the weak spot. Meddlesome taxation has lost us more victories here in France than the vexatious chances of war. I once spent seven years in the hulks of a government department, chained with bourgeois to my bench. There was a clerk in the office, a man with a head on his shoulders; he had set his mind upon making a sweeping reform of the whole fiscal system—ah, well, we took the conceit out of him nicely. France might have been too prosperous, you know she might have amused herself by conquering Europe again; we acted in the interests of the peace of nations. I slew Roubourdin with a caricature.”[*]

[*] See Les Employes [The Government Clerks aka Bureaucracy].

“By *religion* I do not mean cant; I use the word in its wide political sense,” rejoined Blondet.

“Explain your meaning,” said Finot.

“Here it is,” returned Blondet. “There has been a good deal said about affairs at Lyons; about the Republic cannonaded in the streets; well, there was not a word of truth in it all. The Republic took up the riots, just as an insurgent snatches up a rifle. The truth is queer and profound, I can tell you. The Lyons trade is a soulless trade. They will not weave a yard of silk unless they have the order and are sure of payment. If orders fall off; the workmen may starve; they can scarcely earn a living, convicts are better off. After the Revolution of July, the distress reached such a pitch that the Lyons weavers—the *canuts*, as they call them—hoisted the flag, ‘Bread or Death!’ a proclamation of a kind which compels the attention of a government. It was really brought about by the cost of living at Lyons; Lyons must build theatres and become a metropolis, forsooth, and the octroi duties accordingly were insanely high. The Republicans got wind of this bread riot, they organized the *canuts* in two camps, and fought among themselves. Lyons had her Three Days, but order was restored, and the silk weavers went back to their dens. Hitherto the *canut* had been honest; the silk for his work was weighed out to him in hanks, and he brought back the same weight of woven tissue; now he made up his mind that the silk merchants were oppressing him; he put honesty out at the door and rubbed oil on his fingers. He still brought back weight for weight, but he sold the silk represented by the oil; and the French silk



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trade has suffered from a plague of 'greased silks,' which might have ruined Lyons and a whole branch of French commerce. The masters and the government, instead of removing the causes of the evil, simply drove it in with a violent external application. They ought to have sent a clever man to Lyons, one of those men that are said to have no principle, an Abbe Terray; but they looked at the affair from a military point of view. The result of the troubles is a *gros de Naples* at forty *sous* per yard; the silk is sold at this day, I dare say, and the masters no doubt have hit upon some new check upon the men. This method of manufacturing without looking ahead ought never to have existed in the country where one of the greatest citizens that France has ever known ruined himself to keep six thousand weavers in work without orders. Richard Lenoir fed them, and the government was thickheaded enough to allow him to suffer from the fall of the prices of textile fabrics brought about by the Revolution of 1814. Richard Lenoir is the one case of a merchant that deserves a statue. And yet the subscription set on foot for him has no subscribers, while the fund for General Foy's children reached a million francs. Lyons has drawn her own conclusions; she knows France, she knows that there is no religion left. The story of Richard Lenoir is one of those blunders which Fouché condemned as worse than a crime."

"Suppose that there is a tinge of charlatanism in the way in which concerns are put before the public," began Couture, returning to the charge, "that word charlatanism has come to be a damaging expression, a middle term, as it were, between right and wrong; for where, I ask you, does charlatanism begin? where does it end? what is charlatanism? do me the kindness of telling me what it is *not*. Now for a little plain speaking, the rarest social ingredient. A business which should consist in going out at night to look for goods to sell in the day would obviously be impossible. You find the instinct of forestalling the market in the very match-seller. How to forestall the market—that is the one idea of the so-called honest tradesman of the Rue Saint-Denis, as of the most brazen-fronted speculator. If stocks are heavy, sell you must. If sales are slow, you must tickle your customer; hence the signs of the Middle Ages, hence the modern prospectus. I do not see a hair's-breadth of difference between attracting custom and forcing your goods upon the consumer. It may happen, it is sure to happen, it often happens, that a shopkeeper gets hold of damaged goods, for the seller always cheats the buyer. Go and ask the most upright folk in Paris—the best known men in business, that is—and they will all triumphantly tell you of dodges by which they passed off stock which they knew to be bad upon the public. The well-known firm of Minard began by sales of this kind. In the Rue Saint-Denis they sell nothing but 'greased silk';



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it is all that they can do. The most honest merchants tell you in the most candid way that 'you must get out of a bad bargain as best you can'—a motto for the most unscrupulous rascality. Blondet has given you an account of the Lyons affair, its causes and effects, and I proceed in my turn to illustrate my theory with an anecdote:—There was once a woolen weaver, an ambitious man, burdened with a large family of children by a wife too much beloved. He put too much faith in the Republic, laid in a stock of scarlet wool, and manufactured those red-knitted caps that you may have noticed on the heads of all the street urchins in Paris. How this came about I am just going to tell you. The Republic was beaten. After the Saint-Merri affair the caps were quite unsalable. Now, when a weaver finds that besides a wife and children he has some ten thousand red woolen caps in the house, and that no hatter will take a single one of them, notions begin to pass through his head as fast as if he were a banker racking his brains to get rid of ten million francs' worth of shares in some dubious investment. As for this Law of the Faubourg, this Nucingen of caps, do you know what he did? He went to find a pothouse dandy, one of those comic men that drive police sergeants to despair at open-air dancing saloons at the barriers; him he engaged to play the part of an American captain staying at Meurice's and buying for export trade. He was to go to some large hatter, who still had a cap in his shop window, and 'inquire for' ten thousand red woolen caps. The hatter, scenting business in the wind, hurried round to the woolen weaver and rushed upon the stock. After that, no more of the American captain, you understand, and great plenty of caps. If you interfere with the freedom of trade, because free trade has its drawbacks, you might as well tie the hands of justice because a crime sometimes goes unpunished, or blame the bad organization of society because civilization produces some evils. From the caps and the Rue Saint-Denis to joint-stock companies and the Bank ——draw your own conclusions."

"A crown for Couture!" said Blondet, twisting a serviette into a wreath for his head. "I go further than that, gentlemen. If there is a defect in the working hypothesis, what is the cause? The law! the whole system of legislation. The blame rests with the legislature. The great men of their districts are sent up to us by the provinces, crammed with parochial notions of right and wrong; and ideas that are indispensable if you want to keep clear of collisions with justice, are stupid when they prevent a man from rising to the height at which a maker of the laws ought to abide. Legislation may prohibit such and such developments of human passions—gambling, lotteries, the Ninons of the pavement, anything you please—but you cannot extirpate the passions themselves by any amount of legislation. Abolish them, you would abolish the society which develops them, even if it does not produce them. The gambling



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passion lurks, for instance, at the bottom of every heart, be it a girl's heart, a provincial's, a diplomatist's; everybody longs to have money without working for it; you may hedge the desire about with restrictions, but the gambling mania immediately breaks out in another form. You stupidly suppress lotteries, but the cook-maid pilfers none the less, and puts her ill-gotten gains in the savings bank. She gambles with two hundred and fifty franc stakes instead of forty sous; joint-stock companies and speculation take the place of the lottery; the gambling goes on without the green cloth, the croupier's rake is invisible, the cheating planned beforehand. The gambling houses are closed, the lottery has come to an end; 'and now,' cry idiots, 'morals have greatly improved in France,' as if, forsooth, they had suppressed the punters. The gambling still goes on, only the State makes nothing from it now; and for a tax paid with pleasure, it has substituted a burdensome duty. Nor is the number of suicides reduced, for the gambler never dies, though his victim does."

"I am not speaking now of foreign capital lost to France," continued Couture, "nor of the Frankfort lotteries. The Convention passed a decree of death against those who hawked foreign lottery-tickets, and procureur-syndics used to traffic in them. So much for the sense of our legislator and his driveling philanthropy. The encouragement given to savings banks is a piece of crass political folly. Suppose that things take a doubtful turn and people lose confidence, the Government will find that they have instituted a queue for money, like the queues outside the bakers' shops. So many savings banks, so many riots. Three street boys hoist a flag in some corner or other, and you have a revolution ready made.

"But this danger, however great it may be, seems to me less to be dreaded than the widespread demoralization. Savings banks are a means of inoculating the people, the classes least restrained by education or by reason from schemes that are tacitly criminal, with the vices bred of self-interest. See what comes of philanthropy!

"A great politician ought to be without a conscience in abstract questions, or he is a bad steersman for a nation. An honest politician is a steam-engine with feelings, a pilot that would make love at the helm and let the ship go down. A prime minister who helps himself to millions but makes France prosperous and great is preferable, is he not, to a public servant who ruins his country, even though he is buried at the public expense? Would you hesitate between a Richelieu, a Mazarin, or a Potemkin, each with his hundreds of millions of francs, and a conscientious Robert Lindet that could make nothing out of assignats and national property, or one of the virtuous imbeciles who ruined Louis XVI.? Go on, Bixiou."



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“I will not go into the details of the speculation which we owe to Nucingen’s financial genius. It would be the more inexpedient because the concern is still in existence and shares are quoted on the Bourse. The scheme was so convincing, there was such life in an enterprise sanctioned by royal letters patent, that though the shares issued at a thousand francs fell to three hundred, they rose to seven and will reach par yet, after weathering the stormy years ’27, ’30, and ’32. The financial crisis of 1827 sent them down; after the Revolution of July they fell flat; but there really is something in the affair, Nucingen simply could not invent a bad speculation. In short, as several banks of the highest standing have been mixed up in the affair, it would be unparliamentary to go further into detail. The nominal capital amounted to ten millions; the real capital to seven. Three millions were allotted to the founders and bankers that brought it out. Everything was done with a view to sending up the shares two hundred francs during the first six months by the payment of a sham dividend. Twenty per cent, on ten millions! Du Tillet’s interest in the concern amounted to five hundred thousand francs. In the stock-exchange slang of the day, this share of the spoils was a ‘sop in the pan.’ Nucingen, with his millions made by the aid of a lithographer’s stone and a handful of pink paper, proposed to himself to operate certain nice little shares carefully hoarded in his private office till the time came for putting them on the market. The shareholders’ money floated the concern, and paid for splendid business premises, so they began operations. And Nucingen held in reserve founders’ shares in Heaven knows what coal and argentiferous lead-mines, also in a couple of canals; the shares had been given to him for bringing out the concerns. All four were in working order, well got up and popular, for they paid good dividends.

“Nucingen might, of course, count on getting the differences if the shares went up, but this formed no part of the Baron’s schemes; he left the shares at sea-level on the market to tempt the fishes.

“So he had massed his securities as Napoleon massed his troops, all with a view to suspending payment in the thick of the approaching crisis of 1826-27 which revolutionized European markets. If Nucingen had had his Prince of Wagram, he might have said, like Napoleon from the heights of Santon, ‘Make a careful survey of the situation; on such and such a day, at such an hour funds will be poured in at such a spot.’ But in whom could he confide? Du Tillet had no suspicion of his own complicity in Nucingen’s plot; and the bold Baron had learned from his previous experiments in suspensions of payment that he must have some man whom he could trust to act at need as a lever upon the creditor. Nucingen had never a nephew, he dared not take a confidant; yet he must have a devoted and intelligent Claparon, a born diplomatist with a good manner, a man worthy



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of him, and fit to take office under government. Such connections are not made in a day nor yet in a year. By this time Rastignac had been so thoroughly entangled by Nucingen, that being, like the Prince de la Paix, equally beloved by the King and Queen of Spain, he fancied that he (Rastignac) had secured a very valuable dupe in *Nucingen*! For a long while he had laughed at a man whose capacities he was unable to estimate; he ended in a sober, serious, and devout admiration of Nucingen, owning that Nucingen really had the power which he thought he himself alone possessed.

“From Rastignac’s introduction to society in Paris, he had been led to condemn it utterly. From the year 1820 he thought, like the Baron, that honesty was a question of appearances; he looked upon the world as a mixture of corruption and rascality of every sort. If he admitted exceptions, he condemned the mass; he put no belief in any virtue—men did right or wrong, as circumstances decided. His worldly wisdom was the work of a moment; he learned his lesson at the summit of Pere Lachaise one day when he buried a poor, good man there; it was his Delphine’s father, who died deserted by his daughters and their husbands, a dupe of our society and of the truest affection. Rastignac then and there resolved to exploit this world, to wear full dress of virtue, honesty, and fine manners. He was emancipated in selfishness. When the young scion of nobility discovered that Nucingen wore the same armor, he respected him much as some knight mounted upon a barb and arrayed in damascened steel would have respected an adversary equally well horsed and equipped at a tournament in the Middle Ages. But for the time he had grown effeminate amid the delights of Capua. The friendship of such a woman as the Baronne de Nucingen is of a kind that sets a man abjuring egoism in all its forms.

“Delphine had been deceived once already; in her first venture of the affections she came across a piece of Birmingham manufacture, in the shape of the late lamented de Marsay; and therefore she could not but feel a limitless affection for a young provincial’s articles of faith. Her tenderness reacted upon Rastignac. So by the time that Nucingen had put his wife’s friend into the harness in which the exploiter always gets the exploited, he had reached the precise juncture when he (the Baron) meditated a third suspension of payment. To Rastignac he confided his position; he pointed out to Rastignac a means of making ‘reparation.’ As a consequence of his intimacy, he was expected to play the part of confederate. The Baron judged it unsafe to communicate the whole of his plot to his conjugal collaborator. Rastignac quite believed in impending disaster; and the Baron allowed him to believe further that he (Rastignac) saved the shop.



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“But when there are so many threads in a skein, there are apt to be knots. Rastignac trembled for Delphine’s money. He stipulated that Delphine must be independent and her estate separated from her husband’s, swearing to himself that he would repay her by trebling her fortune. As, however, Rastignac said nothing of himself, Nucingen begged him to take, in the event of success, twenty-five shares of a thousand francs in the argentiferous lead-mines, and Eugene took them—not to offend him! Nucingen had put Rastignac up to this the day before that evening in the Rue Joubert when our friend counseled Malvina to marry. A cold shiver ran through Rastignac at the sight of so many happy folk in Paris going to and fro unconscious of the impending loss; even so a young commander might shiver at the first sight of an army drawn up before a battle. He saw the d’Aiglemonts, the d’Aldrighers, and Beaudenord. Poor little Isaure and Godefroid playing at love, what were they but Acis and Galatea under the rock which a hulking Polyphemus was about to send down upon them?”

“That monkey of a Bixiou has something almost like talent,” said Blondet.

“Oh! so I am not maundering now?” asked Bixiou, enjoying his success as he looked round at his surprised auditors.—“For two months past,” he continued, “Godefroid had given himself up to all the little pleasures of preparation for the marriage. At such times men are like birds building nests in spring; they come and go, pick up their bits of straw, and fly off with them in their beaks to line the nest that is to hold a brood of young birds by and by. Isaure’s bridegroom had taken a house in the Rue de la Plancher at a thousand crowns, a comfortable little house neither too large nor too small, which suited them. Every morning he went round to take a look at the workmen and to superintend the painters. He had introduced ‘comfort’ (the only good thing in England)—heating apparatus to maintain an even temperature all over the house; fresh, soft colors, carefully chosen furniture, neither too showy nor too much in fashion; spring-blinds fitted to every window inside and out; silver plate and new carriages. He had seen to the stables, coach-house, and harness-room, where Toby Joby Paddy floundered and fidgeted about like a marmot let loose, apparently rejoiced to know that there would be women about the place and a ‘lady’! This fervent passion of a man that sets up housekeeping, choosing clocks, going to visit his betrothed with his pockets full of patterns of stuffs, consulting her as to the bedroom furniture, going, coming, and trotting about, for love’s sake,—all this, I say, is a spectacle in the highest degree calculated to rejoice the hearts of honest people, especially tradespeople. And as nothing pleases folk better than the marriage of a good-looking young fellow of seven-and-twenty and a charming girl of nineteen that dances admirably well, Godefroid in his perplexity over the corbeille asked *Mme.* de Nucingen and Rastignac to breakfast with him and advise him on this all-important point. He hit likewise on the happy idea of asking his cousin d’Aiglemont and his wife to meet them, as well as *Mme.* de Serizy. Women of the world are ready enough to join for once in an improvised breakfast-party at a bachelor’s rooms.”



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“It is their way of playing truant,” put in Blondet.

“Of course they went over the new house,” resumed Bixiou. “Married women relish these little expeditions as ogres relish warm flesh; they feel young again with the young bliss, unspoiled as yet by fruition. Breakfast was served in Godefroid’s sitting-room, decked out like a troop horse for a farewell to bachelor life. There were dainty little dishes such as women love to devour, nibble at, and sip of a morning, when they are usually alarmingly hungry and horribly afraid to confess to it. It would seem that a woman compromises herself by admitting that she is hungry.—‘Why have you come alone?’ inquired Godefroid when Rastignac appeared.—‘Mme. de Nucingen is out of spirits; I will tell you all about it,’ answered Rastignac, with the air of a man whose temper has been tried.—‘A quarrel?’ hazarded Godefroid.—‘No.’ —At four o’clock the women took flight for the Bois de Boulogne; Rastignac stayed in the room and looked out of the window, fixing his melancholy gaze upon Toby Joby Paddy, who stood, his arms crossed in Napoleonic fashion, audaciously posted in front of Beaudenord’s cab horse. The child could only control the animal with his shrill little voice, but the horse was afraid of Joby Toby.

“‘Well,’ began Godefroid, ‘what is the matter with you, my dear fellow? You look gloomy and anxious; your gaiety is forced. You are tormented by incomplete happiness. It is wretched, and that is a fact, when one cannot marry the woman one loves at the mayor’s office and the church.’

“‘Have you courage to hear what I have to say? I wonder whether you will see how much a man must be attached to a friend if he can be guilty of such a breach of confidence as this for his sake.’

“Something in Rastignac’s voice stung like a lash of a whip.

“‘*What?*’ asked Godefroid de Beaudenord, turning pale.

“‘I was unhappy over your joy; I had not the heart to keep such a secret to myself when I saw all these preparations, your happiness in bloom.’

“‘Just say it out in three words!’

“‘Swear to me on your honor that you will be as silent as the grave——’

“‘As the grave,’ repeated Beaudenord.

“‘That if one of your relatives were concerned in this secret, he should not know it.’

“‘No.’



“Very well. Nucingen started to-night for Brussels. He must file his schedule if he cannot arrange a settlement. This very morning Delphine petitioned for the separation of her estate. You may still save your fortune.’

“How?’ faltered Godefroid; the blood turned to ice in his veins.

“Simply write to the Baron de Nucingen, antedating your letter a fortnight, and instruct him to invest all your capital in shares.’ —Rastignac suggested Claparon and Company, and continued—‘You have a fortnight, a month, possibly three months, in which to realize and make something; the shares are still going up——’



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“But d’Aiglemont, who was here at breakfast with us, has a million in Nucingen’s bank.’

“Look here; I do not know whether there will be enough of these shares to cover it; and besides, I am not his friend, I cannot betray Nucingen’s confidence. You must not speak to d’Aiglemont. If you say a word, you must answer to me for the consequences.’

“Godefroid stood stock still for ten minutes.

“Do you accept? Yes or no!’ said the inexorable Rastignac.

“Godefroid took up the pen, wrote at Rastignac’s dictation, and signed his name.

“My poor cousin!’ he cried.

“Each for himself,’ said Rastignac. ‘And there is one more settled!’ he added to himself as he left Beaudenord.

“While Rastignac was manoeuvring thus in Paris, imagine the state of things on the Bourse. A friend of mine, a provincial, a stupid creature, once asked me as we came past the Bourse between four and five in the afternoon what all that crowd of chatters was doing, what they could possibly find to say to each other, and why they were wandering to and fro when business in public securities was over for the day. ‘My friend,’ said I, ‘they have made their meal, and now they are digesting it; while they digest it, they gossip about their neighbors, or there would be no commercial security in Paris. Concerns are floated here, such and such a man—Palma, for instance, who is something the same here as Sinard at the Academie Royale des Sciences —Palma says, “let the speculation be made!” and the speculation is made.’”

“What a man that Hebrew is,” put in Blondet; “he has not had a university education, but a universal education. And universal does not in his case mean superficial; whatever he knows, he knows to the bottom. He has a genius, an intuitive faculty for business. He is the oracle of all the lynxes that rule the Paris market; they will not touch an investment until Palma has looked into it. He looks solemn, he listens, ponders, and reflects; his interlocutor thinks that after this consideration he has come round his man, till Palma says, ‘This will not do for me.’—The most extraordinary thing about Palma, to my mind, is the fact that he and Werbrust were partners for ten years, and there was never the shadow of a disagreement between them.”

“That is the way with the very strong or the very weak; any two between the extremes fall out and lose no time in making enemies of each other,” said Couture.

“Nucingen, you see, had neatly and skilfully put a little bombshell under the colonnades of the Bourse, and towards four o’clock in the afternoon it exploded.—‘Here is something serious; have you heard the news?’ asked du Tillet, drawing Werbrust into a



corner. 'Here is Nucingen gone off to Brussels, and his wife petitioning for a separation of her estate.'

"'Are you and he in it together for a liquidation?' asked Werbrust, smiling.

"'No foolery, Werbrust,' said du Tillet. 'You know the holders of his paper. Now, look here. There is business in it. Shares in this new concern of ours have gone up twenty per cent already; they will go up to five-and-twenty by the end of the quarter; you know why. They are going to pay a splendid dividend.'



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“‘Sly dog,’ said Werbrust. ‘Get along with you; you are a devil with long and sharp claws, and you have them deep in the butter.’

“‘Just let me speak, or we shall not have time to operate. I hit on the idea as soon as I heard the news. I positively saw *Mme. de Nucingen* crying; she is afraid for her fortune.’

“‘Poor little thing!’ said the old Alsacien Jew, with an ironical expression. ‘Well?’ he added, as *du Tillet* was silent.

“‘Well. At my place I have a thousand shares of a thousand francs in our concern; *Nucingen* handed them over to me to put on the market, do you understand? Good. Now let us buy up a million of *Nucingen’s* paper at a discount of ten or twenty per cent, and we shall make a handsome percentage out of it. We shall be debtors and creditors both; confusion will be worked! But we must set about it carefully, or the holders may imagine that we are operating in *Nucingen’s* interests.’

“Then Werbrust understood. He squeezed *du Tillet’s* hand with an expression such as a woman’s face wears when she is playing her neighbor a trick.

“*Martin Falleix* came up.—‘Well, have you heard the news?’ he asked. ‘*Nucingen* has stopped payment.’

“‘Pooh,’ said Werbrust, ‘pray don’t noise it about; give those that hold his paper a chance.’

“‘What is the cause of the smash; do you know?’ put in *Claparon*.

“‘You know nothing about it,’ said *du Tillet*. ‘There isn’t any smash. Payment will be made in full. *Nucingen* will start again; I shall find him all the money he wants. I know the causes of the suspension. He has put all his capital into Mexican securities, and they are sending him metal in return; old Spanish cannon cast in such an insane fashion that they melted down gold and bell-metal and church plate for it, and all the wreck of the Spanish dominion in the Indies. The specie is slow in coming, and the dear Baron is hard up. That is all.’

“‘It is a fact,’ said Werbrust; ‘I am taking his paper myself at twenty per cent discount.’

“The news spread swift as fire in a straw rick. The most contradictory reports got about. But such confidence was felt in the firm after the two previous suspensions, that every one stuck to *Nucingen’s* paper. ‘*Palma* must lend us a hand,’ said Werbrust.

“Now *Palma* was the *Keller’s* oracle, and the *Kellers* were brimful of *Nucingen’s* paper. A hint from *Palma* would be enough. Werbrust arranged with *Palma*, and he rang the alarm bell. There was a panic next day on the Bourse. The *Kellers*, acting on *Palma’s*



advice, let go Nucingen's paper at ten per cent of loss; they set the example on 'Change, for they were supposed to know very well what they were about. Taillefer followed up with three hundred thousand francs at a discount of twenty per cent, and Martin Falleix with two hundred thousand at fifteen. Gigonnet saw what was going on. He helped to spread the panic, with a view to buying up Nucingen's paper himself and making a commission of two or three per cent out of Werbrust.



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“In a corner of the Bourse he came upon poor Matifat, who had three hundred thousand francs in Nucingen’s bank. Matifat, ghastly and haggard, beheld the terrible Gigonnet, the bill-discounter of his old quarter, coming up to worry him. He shuddered in spite of himself.

“Things are looking bad. There is a crisis on hand. Nucingen is compounding with his creditors. But this does not interest you, Daddy Matifat; you are out of business.’

“Oh, well, you are mistaken, Gigonnet; I am in for three hundred thousand francs. I meant to speculate in Spanish bonds.’

“Then you have saved your money. Spanish bonds would have swept everything away; whereas I am prepared to offer you something like fifty per cent for your account with Nucingen.’

“You are very keen about it, it seems to me,’ said Matifat. ‘I never knew a banker yet that paid less than fifty per cent. Ah, if it were only a matter of ten per cent of loss—’ added the retired man of drugs.

“Well, will you take fifteen?’ asked Gigonnet.

“You are very keen about it, it seems to me,’ said Matifat.

“Good-night.’

“Will you take twelve?’

“Done,’ said Gigonnet.

“Before night two millions had been bought up in the names of the three chance-united confederates, and posted by du Tillet to the debit side of Nucingen’s account. Next day they drew their premium.

“The dainty little old Baroness d’Aldrigger was at breakfast with her two daughters and Godefroid, when Rastignac came in with a diplomatic air to steer the conversation on the financial crisis. The Baron de Nucingen felt a lively regard for the d’Aldrigger family; he was prepared, if things went amiss, to cover the Baroness’ account with his best securities, to wit, some shares in the argentiferous lead-mines, but the application must come from the lady.

“Poor Nucingen!’ said the Baroness. ‘What can have become of him?’

“He is in Belgium. His wife is petitioning for a separation of her property; but he had gone to see if he can arrange with some bankers to see him through.’



“Dear me! That reminds me of my poor husband! Dear M. de Rastignac, how you must feel this, so attached as you are to the house!”

“If all the indifferent are covered, his personal friends will be rewarded later on. He will pull through; he is a clever man.”

“An honest man, above all things,” said the Baroness.

“A month later, Nucingen met all his liabilities, with no formalities beyond the letters by which creditors signified the investments which they preferred to take in exchange for their capital; and with no action on the part of other banks beyond registering the transfer of Nucingen’s paper for the investments in favor.

“While du Tillet, Werbrust, Claparon, Gigonnet, and others that thought themselves clever were fetching in Nucingen’s paper from abroad with a premium of one per cent—for it was still worth their while to exchange it for securities in a rising market—there was all the more talk on the Bourse, because there was nothing now to fear. They babbled over Nucingen; he was discussed and judged; they even slandered him. His luxurious life, his enterprises! When a man has so much on his hands, he overreaches himself, and so forth, and so forth.



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“The talk was at its height, when several people were greatly astonished to receive letters from Geneva, Basel, Milan, Naples, Genoa, Marseilles, and London, in which their correspondents, previously advised of the failure, informed them that somebody was offering one per cent for Nucingen’s paper! ‘There is something up,’ said the lynxes of the Bourse.

“The Court meanwhile had granted the application for *Mme.* de Nucingen’s separation as to her estate, and the question became still more complicated. The newspapers announced the return of M. le Baron de Nucingen from a journey to Belgium; he had been arranging, it was said, with a well-known Belgian firm to resume the working of some coal-pits in the Bois de Bossut. The Baron himself appeared on the Bourse, and never even took the trouble to contradict the slanders circulating against him. He scorned to reply through the press; he simply bought a splendid estate just outside Paris for two millions of francs. Six weeks afterwards, the Bordeaux shipping intelligence announced that two vessels with cargoes of bullion to the amount of seven millions, consigned to the firm of Nucingen, were lying in the river.

“Then it was plain to Palma, Werbrust, and du Tillet that the trick had been played. Nobody else was any the wiser. The three scholars studied the means by which the great bubble had been created, saw that it had been preparing for eleven months, and pronounced Nucingen the greatest financier in Europe.

“Rastignac understood nothing of all this, but he had the four hundred thousand francs which Nucingen had allowed him to shear from the Parisian sheep, and he portioned his sisters. D’Aiglemont, at a hint from his cousin Beaudenord, besought Rastignac to accept ten per cent upon his million if he would undertake to convert it into shares in a canal which is still to make, for Nucingen worked things with the Government to such purpose that the concessionaires find it to their interest not to finish their scheme. Charles Grandet implored Delphine’s lover to use his interest to secure shares for him in exchange for his cash. And altogether Rastignac played the part of Law for ten days; he had the prettiest duchesses in France praying to him to allot shares to them, and to-day the young man very likely has an income of forty thousand livres, derived in the first instance from the argentiferous lead-mines.”

“If every one was better off, who can have lost?” asked Finot.

“Hear the conclusion,” rejoined Bixiou. “The Marquis d’Aiglemont and Beaudenord (I put them forward as two examples out of many) kept their allotted shares, enticed by the so-called dividend that fell due a few months afterwards. They had another three per cent on their capital, they sang Nucingen’s praises, and took his part at a time when everybody suspected that he was going bankrupt. Godefroid married his beloved Isaure and took shares in the mines to the value of a hundred thousand francs.



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The Nucingens gave a ball even more splendid than people expected of them on the occasion of the wedding; Delphine's present to the bride was a charming set of rubies. Isaure danced, a happy wife, a girl no longer. The little Baroness was more than ever a Shepherdess of the Alps. The ball was at its height when Malvina, the *Andalouse* of Musset's poem, heard du Tillet's voice drily advising her to take Desroches. Desroches, warmed to the right degree by Rastignac and Nucingen, tried to come to an understanding financially; but at the first hint of shares in the mines for the bride's portion, he broke off and went back to the Matifat's in the Rue du Cherche-Midi, only to find the accursed canal shares which Gigonnet had foisted on Matifat in lieu of cash.

"They had not long to wait for the crash. The firm of Claparon did business on too large a scale, the capital was locked up, the concern ceased to serve its purposes, or to pay dividends, though the speculations were sound. These misfortunes coincided with the events of 1827. In 1829 it was too well known that Claparon was a man of straw set up by the two giants; he fell from his pedestal. Shares that had fetched twelve hundred and fifty francs fell to four hundred, though intrinsically they were worth six. Nucingen, knowing their value, bought them up at four.

"Meanwhile the little Baroness d'Aldrigger had sold out of the mines that paid no dividends, and Godefroid had reinvested the money belonging to his wife and her mother in Claparon's concern. Debts compelled them to realize when the shares were at their lowest, so that of seven hundred thousand francs only two hundred thousand remained. They made a clearance, and all that was left was prudently invested in the three per cents at seventy-five. Godefroid, the sometime gay and careless bachelor who had lived without taking thought all his life long, found himself saddled with a little goose of a wife totally unfitted to bear adversity (indeed, before six months were over, he had witnessed the anserine transformation of his beloved) to say nothing of a mother-in-law whose mind ran on pretty dresses while she had not bread to eat. The two families must live together to live at all. It was only by stirring up all his considerably chilled interest that Godefroid got a post in the audit department. His friends?—They were out of town. His relatives?—All astonishment and promises. 'What! my dear boy! Oh! count upon me! Poor fellow!' and Beaudenord was clean forgotten fifteen minutes afterwards. He owed his place to Nucingen and de Vandenesse.

"And to-day these so estimable and unfortunate people are living on a third floor (not counting the entresol) in the Rue du Mont Thabor. Malvina, the Adolphus' pearl of a granddaughter, has not a farthing. She gives music-lessons, not to be a burden upon her brother-in-law. You may see a tall, dark, thin, withered woman, like a mummy escaped from Passalacqua's about afoot through the streets of Paris. In 1830 Beaudenord lost his situation just as his wife presented him with a fourth child. A family of eight and two servants (Wirth and his wife) and an income of eight thousand livres.

And at this moment the mines are paying so well, that an original share of a thousand francs brings in a dividend of cent per cent.



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“Rastignac and *Mme. de Nucingen* bought the shares sold by the Baroness and Godefrid. The Revolution made a peer of France of Nucingen and a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor. He has not stopped payment since 1830, but still I hear that he has something like seventeen millions. He put faith in the Ordinances of July, sold out of all his investments, and boldly put his money into the funds when the three per cents stood at forty-five. He persuaded the Tuileries that this was done out of devotion, and about the same time he and du Tillet between them swallowed down three millions belonging to that great scamp Philippe Bridau.

“Quite lately our Baron was walking along the Rue de Rivoli on his way to the Bois when he met the Baroness d’Aldrigger under the colonnade. The little old lady wore a tiny green bonnet with a rose-colored lining, a flowered gown, and a mantilla; altogether, she was more than ever the Shepherdess of the Alps. She could no more be made to understand the causes of her poverty than the sources of her wealth. As she went along, leaning upon poor Malvina, that model of heroic devotion, she seemed to be the young girl and Malvina the old mother. Wirth followed them, carrying an umbrella.

“‘Dere are beoples whose vordune I vound it imbossible to make,’ said the Baron, addressing his companion (M. Cointet, a cabinet minister). ‘Now dot de baroxysm off brinciples haf bassed off, chust reinshtate dot boor Peautenord.’

“So Beaudenord went back to his desk, thanks to Nucingen’s good offices; and the d’Aldriggers extol Nucingen as a hero of friendship, for he always sends the little Shepherdess of the Alps and her daughters invitations to his balls. No creature whatsoever can be made to understand that the Baron yonder three times did his best to plunder the public without breaking the letter of the law, and enriched people in spite of himself. No one has a word to say against him. If anybody should suggest that a big capitalist often is another word for a cut-throat, it would be a most egregious calumny. If stocks rise and fall, if property improves and depreciates, the fluctuations of the market are caused by a common movement, a something in the air, a tide in the affairs of men subject like other tides to lunar influences. The great Arago is much to blame for giving us no scientific theory to account for this important phenomenon. The only outcome of all this is an axiom which I have never seen anywhere in print——”

“And that is?”

“The debtor is more than a match for the creditor.”

“Oh!” said Blondet. “For my own part, all that we have been saying seems to me to be a paraphrase of the epigram in which Montesquieu summed up *l’Esprit des Lois*.”

“What?” said Finot.

“Laws are like spiders’ webs; the big flies get through, while the little ones are caught.”

“Then, what are you for?” asked Finot.



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“For absolute government, the only kind of government under which enterprises against the spirit of the law can be put down. Yes. Arbitrary rule is the salvation of a country when it comes to the support of justice, for the right of mercy is strictly one-sided. The king can pardon a fraudulent bankrupt; he cannot do anything for the victims. The letter of the law is fatal to modern society.”

“Just get that into the electors’ heads!” said Bixiou.

“Some one has undertaken to do it.”

“Who?”

“Time. As the Bishop of Leon said, ‘Liberty is ancient, but kingship is eternal; any nation in its right mind returns to monarchical government in one form or another.’”

“I say, there was somebody next door,” said Finot, hearing us rise to go.

“There always is somebody next door,” retorted Bixiou. “But he must have been drunk.”

PARIS, November 1837.

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Aiglemont, General, Marquis Victor d’
At the Sign of the Cat and Racket
A Woman of Thirty

Beaudenord, Godefroid de
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
The Ball at Sceaux

Bidault (known as Gigonnet)
The Government Clerks
Gobseck
The Vendetta
Cesar Birotteau
A Daughter of Eve

Bixiou, Jean-Jacques
The Purse
A Bachelor’s Establishment
The Government Clerks



Modeste Mignon
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
The Muse of the Department
Cousin Betty
The Member for Arcis
Beatrix
A Man of Business
Gaudissart II.
The Unconscious Humorists
Cousin Pons

Blondet, Emile
Jealousies of a Country Town
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Modeste Mignon
Another Study of Woman
The Secrets of a Princess
A Daughter of Eve
The Peasantry

Claparon, Charles
A Bachelor's Establishment
Cesar Birotteau
Melmoth Reconciled
A Man of Business
The Middle Classes

Cochin, Emile-Louis-Lucien-Emmanuel
Cesar Birotteau
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The Middle Classes

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