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Honoré de Balzac

Honoré de Balzac

PHILOSOPHIC
AND ANALYTIC STUDIES

VOLUME V

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NO. 713



ADREN-MOREAU.

IN THE LABORATORY

Wearry of waiting, Marguerite went up to the laboratory.

* * * * *

Lemulquinier, who was engaged in turning the disc, the machine being mounted on a moveable axis, so as to keep the lens always perpendicular to the sun's rays, rose, his face black with dust, and said:

THE NOVELS
OF
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME
COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

BY G. BURNHAM IVES

WITH FIVE ETCHINGS BY XAVIER LE SUEUR AND
CHARLES-THÉODORE DEBLOIS, AFTER PAINT-
INGS BY ADRIEN MOREAU

IN ONE VOLUME

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THE QUEST OF THE ABSOLUTE

189974

TO MADAME JOSÉPHINE DELANNOY, NÉE DOUMERC

I pray God, Madame, that this book may have a longer life than mine! the gratitude which I have vowed to you, and which, I trust, will equal your almost maternal affection for me, will in that case exist beyond the limits ordained for our sentiments. That sublime privilege of extending thus by the life of our works the life of our hearts, if one could ever be assured of it, would be a sufficient consolation for all the trouble it costs those whose ambition it is to win it. I will say again, therefore: may God grant it!

DE BALZAC.

*

There exists at Douai, on Rue de Paris, a house whose external aspect, interior arrangements, and details of construction have retained, to a greater degree than those of other buildings, the peculiarities of the old Flemish architecture, so naïvely appropriate to the patriarchal manners of that excellent country; but, before describing it, it will be advisable, perhaps, in the interest of authors generally, to demonstrate the necessity of these didactic preliminaries, against which certain ignorant and greedy persons protest who seek emotion without undergoing its generative principles, the flower without the seed, the child without gestation. Is Art to be considered more powerful than Nature?

The events of human life, public as well as private, are so closely connected with architecture, that most observers are able to reconstruct nations or individuals with entire accuracy, in respect to their habits, from the remains of their public monuments or by examining their domestic relics. Archæology is to social nature what comparative anatomy is to organic nature. A mosaic discloses a whole social epoch, just as the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus implies a whole creation. In both directions everything can be logically deduced, everything forms a link in the chain. Causes foreshadow effects, just as each effect enables us to go back to its cause. Thus the scholar

re-creates even the little excrescences of bygone ages. Doubtless this explains the extraordinary interest aroused by an architectural description, when the author's fancy does not distort its elements; for everyone can connect it with the past by rigid deductions, and to man the past bears a singular resemblance to the future: to tell him what has been is almost always equivalent to telling him what will be. Moreover, it seldom happens that a description of places where men have passed their lives does not remind each one who reads it either of his broken vows or of his budding hopes. The comparison between a present which disappoints one's secret wishes and a future which may gratify them is an inexhaustible source of melancholy or of placid satisfaction. So it is that it is almost impossible to avoid a sort of emotion in presence of a painting of Flemish life when its accessories are faithfully depicted. Why? Perhaps because it is, of the different forms of existence, the one that puts an end most satisfactorily to man's uncertainties. It cannot be dissociated from all the national festivities, all the family ties, a sleek air of comfort which attests constant prosperity; but it expresses above all else the tranquil monotony of a frankly sensual happiness, in which enjoyment stifles desire by always anticipating it.

Whatever value the passionate man may attach to the turmoil of sentiments, he never witnesses without emotion the images of that social nature where the pulsations of the heart are so carefully

regulated that superficial people reproach it with coldness. The multitude generally prefers the abnormal force which overflows to the regular force applied with persistency. The multitude has neither the time nor the patience to understand the immense power concealed beneath an appearance of uniformity. So that, to impress that multitude, borne on by the current of life, passion, like the great artist, has no other resource than to go beyond the goal, as Michel Angelo did, and Bianca Capello, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Beethoven, and Paganini. Only the great reasoners understand that one should never pass one's goal, and respect only the potentiality that is evidenced by a perfect achievement which imparts to every work the profound tranquillity whose charm impresses men of superior mould. Now, the manner of life adopted by that essentially economical people supplies all the conditions of felicity of which the masses dream as essential to the existence of the modest middle-class citizen.

The most refined materialism is imprinted upon all the Flemish habits. English comfort is marked by harsh, unpleasant tones; whereas, in Flanders, the old interiors rejoice the eye with soothing colors, with genuine homeliness; they suggest work without fatigue; the pipe denotes a happy application of the Neapolitan *far niente*; a placid understanding of art is indicated as well, its most essential element, patience, and that which makes its creations lasting, conscientiousness; the Flemish character is described in those two words, patience and conscientiousness,

which would seem to exclude the fruitful shades of poesy, and to make the manners of that country as flat and uninteresting as its vast plains, as cold as its foggy sky. Nevertheless, nothing of the sort is true. Civilization has exhibited its power there by modifying everything, even the effects of the climate. If we observe carefully the products of the different countries of the globe, we are first of all surprised to see that the different shades of gray and fawn-color are especially prevalent in the products of the temperate zones, while the most brilliant colors distinguish those of the hot countries. Morals must necessarily conform to that natural law. Flanders, which was formerly an essentially sombre country, given over to monotony of coloring, found a method of injecting brilliancy into its smoky atmosphere through the political vicissitudes which subjected it successively to the Burgundians, the Spaniards, and the French, and compelled its people to make common cause with the Germans and the Dutch. From their Spanish associations they retained the rich shades of scarlet, glossy satins, showy carpets, feathers, mandolins, and courteous manners. From Venice they received, in exchange for their linen and laces, the fanciful glassware wherein the wine sparkles and seems to taste better. From Austria they derived that ponderous diplomacy which, according to a popular saying, takes three steps in a bushel measure. Trade with the Indies caused an influx of the grotesque inventions of China and the marvels of Japan. And yet, despite

its patience in retaining whatever it acquires, in letting nothing go, in enduring everything, Flanders could hardly be looked upon except as the general warehouse of Europe down to the period when the discovery of tobacco welded together the scattered national features with smoke. Since then, notwithstanding the clipping of its territory, the Flemish people has existed through the pipe and beer.

After assimilating, by means of the never-failing economy of its conduct, the treasures and the ideas of its masters and its neighbors, that country, naturally so dull and devoid of poesy, shaped for itself an original mode of life and characteristic manners, without seeming to incur the reproach of servility. Art stripped off all idealism to reproduce form alone. Do not look to that country, therefore, for poetry in plaster, nor for vigorous comedy, nor for dramatic action, nor for the bold flights of the epic or the ode, nor for musical genius; but it is fertile in discoveries, in learned discussions which require both time and the midnight oil. Everything there bears the stamp of temporal enjoyment. Men see exclusively what *is*, their mind adapts its attitude so scrupulously to promote the necessities of life, that it has never overstepped the limits of reality in any work. The only idea of the future as conceived by that people was a species of economy in politics, their revolutionary strength is due to the domestic desire to have the elbows free at table, and complete absence of restraint under the overhanging roofs of their *steedes*. The sentiment of well-being and the spirit

of independence, to which wealth gives birth, engendered there sooner than elsewhere the necessity for liberty, which later assailed all Europe. In like manner, the constancy of their ideas and the tenacity which education implants in the Flemings made them formerly a race to be feared when they were defending their rights. With them nothing is done by halves, neither their houses nor their furniture, nor their dikes nor their farming, nor their revolutions. So that they retain a monopoly in whatever they undertake. The manufacture of lace, a task requiring patient labor in the fields and more patient manufacturing skill, and the making of linen, are hereditary among them, like their patrimonial fortunes. If one were called upon to depict constancy in its purest human form, perhaps one could do no better than to take the portrait of a worthy burgomaster of the Low Countries, capable, as so many of them have proved to be, of dying modestly and without ostentation for the good of his guild. But the grateful poetic charm of that patriarchal existence will naturally come to light in a description of one of the last houses in Douai which still retained its characteristics at the time when this story begins.

Of all the towns in the department of the Nord, Douai is, alas! the one that has become most modernized, where the thirst for innovation has made the most rapid strides, where the love of social progress has spread most widely. There the old buildings are disappearing day by day, the old manners and customs dying out. The tone, the styles, the

manners, of Paris are in the ascendant; and ere long the people of Douai will have naught remaining of the old Flemish life save the hospitable cordiality, the Spanish courtesy, the wealth and the cleanliness of Holland. White stone mansions will soon have replaced the brick houses. The substantial Dutch architecture will have yielded to the varying elegance of French novelties.

The house in which the incidents of this tale occurred is situated almost in the middle of Rue de Paris, and has been known in Douai for more than two hundred years as "Claes House." The Van Claes were formerly one of the most illustrious families of mechanics to whom the Low Countries owed the commercial supremacy in several products which they have always retained. For a long time, the Claes were, generation after generation, leaders of the powerful guild of weavers in the city of Ghent. At the time of the revolt of that great city against Charles V., who endeavored to suppress its privileges, the wealthiest of the Claes was so deeply involved that, foreseeing a catastrophe and compelled to share the fate of his companions, he secretly sent away his wife, his children, and his treasure, and placed them under French protection, before the Emperor's troops had invested the city. The syndic's previsions were fulfilled. He, with several other burghers, was excepted from the capitulation and hanged as a rebel, whereas he was in reality the defender of the independence of Ghent. The deaths of Claes and his companions bore fruit. At a later

date, those useless executions cost the King of Spain the greater part of his possessions in the Low Countries. Of all the seeds entrusted to the earth, the blood shed by martyrs produces the speediest crop. When Philip II., who punished the revolt to the second generation, extended his iron sceptre over Douai, the Claes preserved their great wealth, allying themselves with the very noble family of Molina, whose elder branch, at that time impoverished, became wealthy enough to be in a position to redeem the comté of Nourho, in the Kingdom of Leon, of which it was only titular possessor.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after many vicissitudes which it would be in nowise interesting to describe, the family of Claes was represented, in the branch settled at Douai, by Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina, Count of Nourho, who chose to call himself plain Balthazar Claes. Of the vast fortune amassed by his ancestors, who had practised innumerable trades, Balthazar still possessed about fifteen thousand francs a year in real estate in the arrondissement of Douai, in addition to the house on Rue de Paris, the furniture in which was worth a fortune.

As for the property in the Kingdom of Leon, that had been the subject of a lawsuit between the Molinas of Flanders and that branch of the family which had remained in Spain. The Molinas of Leon secured the estates, and assumed the title of counts of Nourho, although the Claes alone had the right to bear it; but the vanity of the Belgian bourgeoisie

was superior to Castilian pride. And so, when the *état civil* was instituted, Balthazar laid aside the rags of his Spanish nobility in favor of his eminent station as a burgher of Ghent. The sentiment of patriotism is so firmly rooted in exiled families that, even in the last years of the eighteenth century, the Claes were still faithful to their traditions, their manners, and customs. They formed alliances only with families of the purest burgher blood: a woman must be able to point to a certain number of sheriffs or burgo-masters among her kindred to be admitted into their family. Indeed, they went to Bruges, Ghent, or Liège, or into Holland for their wives, in order to perpetuate the customs of their domestic life. Toward the close of the last century, their social circle, having grown constantly smaller and smaller, was reduced to seven or eight families of parliamentary nobility, whose morals, whose togas with their ample folds, and whose half-Spanish, magisterial gravity were in harmony with their habits. The people of the town entertained a sort of religious respect for the family, who were to them a predilection, so to speak. The never-failing uprightness, the stainless honor of the Claes, their invariable decorum, made them the subject of a superstition as inveterate as that of the feast of Gayant, and well expressed by the name "Claes House." The spirit of old Flanders breathed in that dwelling, which presented to admirers of bourgeois antiquities a typical example of the unpretentious houses which wealthy burghers of the Middle Ages built for themselves.

The principal ornament of the façade was an oaken folding-door, trimmed with nails arranged in quincunxes, in the centre of which the Claes had proudly caused to be carved two shuttles joined together. The door-frame was of sandstone and was capped by a pointed arch from which was suspended a small lantern surmounted by a cross, in which could be seen a statuette of Sainte Geneviève spinning. Although time had cast its darkening tinge upon the delicate handiwork of the doorway and the lantern, the extreme care bestowed upon them by the servants of the house enabled the passer-by to grasp all their details. For instance, the door-post, composed of a group of small pillars, preserved a deep-gray color, and shone so that one might think it had been varnished. On each side of the door, on the ground-floor, were two windows like all those in the house. The white stone frame ended under the sill in a shell richly carved, and above, in two arches, separated by the upright of the cross which divided the window into four unequal parts, for the cross-piece, being placed at the requisite height to represent a cross, made the two lower parts almost twice as large as the upper ones, which were rounded at the top by the arched frames. The twofold arch was embellished by three rows of bricks, each protruding beyond the last, the alternate bricks in each row being set forward about an inch, making a sort of fretwork. The panes, which were small and diamond-shaped, were set in extremely slender iron bars, painted red. The walls, of brick pointed with white

mortar, were supported at intervals and at the corners by courses of stone. There were five windows on the first floor, only three on the second, and the attic was lighted by a large round opening with five compartments, with a frame of sandstone, set in the centre of the triangular pediment formed by the gable, like the rose-window over the grand portal of a cathedral. On the ridge-pole, by way of weathercock, was a distaff with its supply of flax. The two sides of the great triangle formed by the wall of the gable were cut by something like steps as far as the coping of the first floor, where, on both sides of the house, the rain-water fell from the open jaws of a fantastic gargoyle. At the lower part of the wall was a course of sandstone in imitation of a step. Finally,—and this was the last trace of the ancient customs,—on each side of the door, between the two windows, was a wooden trap-door, strengthened by stout iron bands, which gave access to the cellar.

Ever since it was built, that façade had been carefully cleaned twice a year. If a little mortar were lacking in a joint, the hole was at once filled. The windows, the sills, the stonework, everything was dusted more thoroughly than the most valuable statues are dusted in Paris. So that that house-front showed no trace of deterioration. Notwithstanding the dark color of the bricks, due to their age, they were as well preserved as it is possible for an old picture to be, or an old book, dear to the heart of a collector, which would be always new

were they not subjected, in our bell-glass atmosphere, to the influence of gases whose malignant qualities threaten our own well-being.

The cloudy skies, the damp atmosphere of Flanders, and the shadows due to the narrowness of the street very often deprived that house of the polish which it borrowed from its labored cleanliness, and which made it cold and depressing to the eye. A poet would have loved to see a blade or two of grass in the cracks of the lantern, or moss on the jutting sandstone, he would have wished that those rows of bricks were cracked, that a swallow had built his nest under the window arches, in the triple row of red pigeon-holes which embellished them. In truth, the high finish, the super-cleanly aspect of that façade, half-worn by rubbing, gave it a sedately genteel and respectable look, which would certainly have caused a lover of the romantic to change his quarters if he had lived opposite.

When a visitor had pulled the twisted iron cord of the bell which hung by the door-post, and the servant had opened that leaf of the door in the centre of which was a little wicket, it slipped at once from her hand, by reason of its great weight, and flew back, echoing under the arches of a spacious flagged gallery and through the inmost recesses of the house with a solemn, heavy sound as if it were of bronze. That gallery, painted in imitation of marble, always cool and with a layer of fine sand on the floor, led to a great square interior courtyard, paved with large glazed tiles of a greenish color. At the left were

the laundry, the kitchens, the servants' quarters; at the right, the wood-shed, the coal-bins, and the offices, the doors, windows, and walls of the latter embellished with architectural designs which were always exquisitely clean. The light, sifted between four red walls striped with lines of white, acquired a pink tinge which gave to men's faces and to the most trivial details a mysterious charm and fantastic appearance.

A second house exactly like the one on the street, and known in Flanders by the name of *quartier de derrière*, stood at the other end of the courtyard and was used solely as the dwelling of the family. On the ground-floor, the first room was a parlor lighted by two windows on the courtyard side, and by two others looking on a garden whose width corresponded to that of the house. Two glass doors, on opposite sides of the room, led to the courtyard and garden, respectively, and were on a line with the street-door, so that a stranger, on entering from the street, could see the whole property from end to end, to the foliage at the rear of the garden. The building in front, intended for receptions, with the guest-rooms on the second floor, undoubtedly contained many objects of art and the accumulated treasures of years; but in the eyes of the Claes, as well as in the opinion of connoisseurs, nothing could compare with the treasures which adorned that room in which the life of the family had been lived for two centuries. The Claes who laid down his life in the cause of the liberties of Ghent, the artisan of whom we should

conceive an inadequate idea if the historian should omit to say that he possessed nearly forty thousand silver marks, amassed in the manufacture of sail-cloth for the all-powerful Venetian navy,—that Claes had for a friend the famous wood-carver Van Huysium of Bruges. Many a time the artist had had recourse to the artisan's purse. Some time previous to the revolt of the people of Ghent, Van Huysium, having become rich, had secretly carved for his friend a solid ebony wainscoting, whereon were represented the principal scenes in the life of Arteveld, the brewer, who was for an instant King of Flanders. That wainscoting, composed of sixty panels, contained about fourteen hundred principal figures, and was considered Van Huysium's greatest work. The captain to whom was entrusted the duty of guarding the burghers whom Charles V. had decided to have hanged on the day of his entry into his natal city, proposed to Van Claes, it is said, to allow him to escape, if he would give him Van Huysium's masterpiece. But the weaver had already sent it to France.

The parlor, being wainscoted entirely with those panels, which, out of respect for the shades of the martyr, Van Huysium himself had framed in wood painted in ultramarine mingled with threads of gold, was, therefore, the most perfect work of that master whose least important works are sold to-day for almost their weight in gold. About the fireplace, Van Claes, painted by Titian in his costume of president of the court of the Parchons, seemed still to

lead that family, who looked with veneration upon him as their great man. The fireplace, originally of stone, with a very high mantel, had been rebuilt of white marble in the last century; and upon the mantel were an old clock, and two candelabra with five twisted branches, in wretched taste, but of solid silver. The four windows were decorated with long, red damask curtains, with black flowers, lined with white silk, and the furniture, covered with the same material, had been renovated under Louis XIV. The floor, which was unmistakably modern, consisted of great squares of white wood surrounded by strips of oak. The ceiling, formed by several cartouches, in the centre of which was a mask carved by Van Huysium, had been respected, and retained the dark tints of Holland oak. At the four corners of the parlor arose truncated columns, surmounted by candelabra similar to those on the mantel; a round table stood in the middle of the room. Along the walls card-tables were symmetrically arranged. Upon two gilded consoles, with white marble tops, were placed at the period at which this narrative begins, two glass globes full of water with a bed of sand and shells, in which red, gold, and silver fish were swimming. That room was at the same time bright and dismal. The ceiling necessarily absorbed the light, without reflecting it at all. Although light abounded on the garden side, and played in and out of the carvings of the ebony, the windows on the courtyard admitted very little, and hardly awoke a gleam in the threads of gold on the opposite wall. Thus

that parlor, splendid as it was on a fine day, was generally filled with the soft, reddish, melancholy tones which the sun casts upon the tree-tops in autumn. It is useless to continue the description of Claes House, in other parts of which several of the scenes of this narrative will necessarily take place; it is enough, at this moment, to understand its general arrangement.

*

One Sunday after vespers, in the latter part of August, 1812, a woman was sitting in her easy-chair at one of the garden windows. The sun's rays fell obliquely on the house, shone slantwise across the parlor, expired in fantastic reflections on the wainscoting which covered the wall on the courtyard side, and enveloped the woman in the zone of purple projected by the damask curtain hanging at the window. A painter of even moderate ability who had copied that woman at that moment, would certainly have produced a striking picture, with a face so overflowing with sorrow and melancholy. The attitude of the body, as well as the position of the feet, which were thrust forward, indicated the prostrated condition of one who loses consciousness of her physical being in the concentration of her powers due to their being absorbed by a fixed thought; she followed its gleams into the future, as frequently, on the seashore, we gaze at a sunbeam which pierces the clouds and makes a band of light along the horizon. Her hands were hanging listlessly over the arms of the chair, and her head, as if it were too heavy, rested against the back. A white percale dress, very simply made, prevented one from forming an accurate idea of her proportions, and her bust was disguised beneath the folds of a scarf crossed over her breast and carelessly tied. So that, even

if the light had not shone full upon her face, which she seemed to prefer to show rather than the rest of her person, it would have been impossible not to give one's attention exclusively to it; her expression, which would have impressed the most heedless of children, was one of persistent, cold stupefaction, despite a few burning tears. Nothing can be more painful to see than that extreme grief which overflows only at rare intervals, but which remained upon that face like lava hardened around a volcano. You would have said that she was a dying mother obliged to leave her children in an abyss of misery, unable to bequeath to them any human protection.

The face of that woman, who was then about forty years of age, but was much less far removed from beauty than she had ever been in her youth, presented none of the characteristic features of the Flemish race. A mass of thick, black hair fell in curls over her shoulders and beside her cheeks. Her forehead, very prominent and narrow at the temples, was of a yellowish hue, but beneath it gleamed two black eyes which flashed fire. The face, wholly Spanish in type, dark, with little color, and marked by small-pox, arrested the eye by the perfection of its shape, its contour retaining, despite the alteration of the lines, a suggestion of majestic refinement, which sometimes reappeared in its entirety when some mental effort restored its primitive purity. The feature which imparted most distinction to that virile face was a nose hooked like an eagle's beak, which bulged too much in the middle and seemed to

be malformed within; but an indescribable refinement resided therein; the partition between the nostrils was so thin that its transparence permitted the light to redden it. Although the lips, which were large and deeply creased, revealed the pride inspired by noble birth, they were stamped with natural kindness and breathed courtesy. One might deny the beauty of that powerful and at the same time essentially feminine face, but it compelled attention. Being small of stature, deformed and lame, that woman remained unmarried longer because everybody persisted in denying that she possessed intelligence; nevertheless, it sometimes happened that men were deeply stirred by the passionate ardor which her face expressed, by the indications of an inexhaustible store of affection, and remained under a spell not to be reconciled with so many defects. She resembled in many ways her ancestor, the Duke of Casa-Real, a grandee of Spain.

At that moment, the charm which formerly laid hold so despotically of minds enamored of poesy gleamed in her face more abundantly than at any moment of her past life, and was exerted, so to speak, on the empty air, giving expression to a fascinating will, all-powerful upon men, but powerless to influence destinies. When her eyes left the bowl containing the fish, at which she gazed without seeing them, she raised them despairingly as if to appeal to Heaven. Her sufferings seemed to be of those which can be confided to God alone. The silence was broken only by crickets, by grasshoppers

chirping in the little garden, from which an oven-like heat arose, and by the muffled sounds of silver-ware, plates, and chairs, which a servant moved about as she laid the table for dinner in a room adjoining the parlor.

At the moment our story opens, the grief-stricken woman heard a sound in the distance, and seemed to collect her faculties; she took her handkerchief, wiped her eyes, tried to smile, and succeeded so well in banishing the sorrowful expression engraved upon all her features, that one would have believed her to be in that state of indifference in which a life devoid of anxiety leaves us. Whether it was that the habit of living in that house, to which her infirmities confined her, had made it possible for her to detect some natural phenomena imperceptible to others, but which persons who are prone to extremes of sentiment earnestly seek; or whether nature had made up to her for so many physical shortcomings by bestowing upon her senses more delicate than are given to beings apparently endowed with a more perfect organization, that woman had heard a man's footstep in a gallery built over the kitchens and servants' quarters, by which the house in front communicated with the house in the rear. The sound of steps became more and more distinct. Ere long, even though he had not the power with which a passionate creature like her can often do away with space to join another self, a stranger could readily have heard the steps on the stairs leading from the gallery to the parlor. The most heedless person

would have been assailed by many thoughts upon hearing that echoing step, for it was impossible to listen to it unmoved. A precipitate or jerky step alarms us. When a man rises and shouts "fire!" his feet speak as loud as his voice. That being so, a step of a contrary description should cause us no less powerful emotion. The slow, solemn, dragging step of the man who was approaching would doubtless have jarred upon the unreflecting; but a careful observer or a nervous person would have felt a sentiment akin to terror at the measured tread of those feet from which life seemed to have departed, and which made the floor-boards creak as if two iron weights were descending upon them one after another. You would have recognized the undecided, heavy step of an old man, or the majestic gait of a thinker who carries worlds upon his shoulders.

When that man had descended the last stair, he brought his feet together upon the flags with a hesitating movement, and stood for a moment on the broad landing from which the passage-way led to the servants' quarters, and from which one could also enter the parlor or the dining-room through doors hidden in the wainscoting on opposite sides.

At that moment, a slight shudder, not unlike the sensation caused by an electric spark, ran through the frame of the woman sitting in the easy-chair; but at the same time the sweetest of smiles played about her lips, and her face, transfigured by anticipation of a pleasure, shone resplendent like the face of a beautiful Italian madonna; suddenly she found

strength to force back her fears to the depths of her heart; then she turned her face toward the panels of the door which was about to open in the corner of the parlor, and which was, in fact, thrown open so abruptly that the poor creature seemed to have received the impulse given to it.

Balthazar Claes suddenly appeared, took a few steps into the room, did not look at the woman who was sitting there, or, if he did look at her, did not see her, and stood still, resting his head, slightly bent, upon his right hand. A horrible pang, to which she could not accustom herself, although it recurred constantly every day, contracted her heart, dissipated her smile, caused folds to appear on her dark forehead between the eyebrows, about the furrow hollowed out by the frequent expression of passionate sentiments; her eyes filled with tears, but she abruptly wiped them away as she glanced at Balthazar. It was impossible not to be profoundly impressed by the aspect of that head of the Claes family. In his youth, he must have resembled the sublime martyr who threatened Charles V. with a repetition of Arteveld; but, at the time of which we write, he seemed to be more than sixty years old, although he was about fifty, and his premature old age had destroyed that noble likeness. His tall figure was slightly bent, whether because the work in which he was engaged compelled him to stoop, or because the spinal column had curved under the weight of his head. He had a full neck and a broad chest; but the lower portions of his

body were slender, although endowed with nervous strength; and that lack of harmony in an organization that was evidently once perfect puzzled the mind, which sought in some peculiar mode of life an explanation of that abnormal figure. His abundant light hair, of which he took but little care, fell over his shoulders in the German fashion, but in a disorderly mass which harmonized with the general singularity of his appearance. His broad forehead was marked by the protuberances in which Gall located the poetic impulses. His eyes, of a deep, limpid blue, had the sudden vivacity noticeable in illustrious seekers after hidden causes. His nose, which had in all probability been perfect in shape formerly, had lengthened, and the nostrils seemed to open gradually more and more by an involuntary tension of the olfactory muscles. The hairy cheekbones were very prominent, and the cheeks, already wrinkled, seemed the more hollow on that account; his mouth, most graceful in outline, was closely confined between the nose and a short chin, sharply upturned. The shape of his face, however, was long rather than oval; indeed, the scientific theory which attributes to every human face a resemblance to the face of some animal would have found an additional argument in the case of Balthazar Claes, whose face might have been compared to a horse's. His skin was drawn tightly around his bones, as if some hidden fire were constantly drying it; then, at times, when he stared into space as if seeing there the realization of his hopes, you would have said

that he breathed forth through his nostrils the flame that consumed his soul.

The deep-rooted sentiments which inspire great men exhaled from that pale face furrowed with deep wrinkles, shone upon that brow contracted like that of a careworn old king, and, above all, in those gleaming eyes whose fire seemed to be increased alike by the chastity due to the tyranny of ideas and by the internal flame of a vast intellect. The eyes, set deep in their orbits, seemed to owe the dark circles by which they were surrounded to naught but midnight vigils and the terrible reactions of a hope constantly crushed and as often born anew. The zealous fanaticism inspired by art or science was also betrayed in that man by a strange and persistent absent-mindedness, to which his dress and demeanor bore witness, in accord with the abnormal magnificence of his face. His large, hairy hands were dirty, his long nails had at the ends very deep, black lines. His shoes were not cleaned, and lacked strings. Of all the household, none but the master was given the strange license to be so unclean about his person. His black broadcloth trousers covered with spots, his buttonless waistcoat, his cravat tied askew, and his green coat, always ripped, completed an extraordinary combination of small things and great which, in any other man, would have revealed the destitution engendered by vice, but which, in the case of Balthazar Claes, was simply the heedlessness of genius. Too often, vice and genius produce similar results, which mislead

the multitude. Genius is nothing more than constant excess, which devours time, money, and the body, and which leads to the poorhouse even more rapidly than evil passions. Indeed, men seem to have more respect for vice than for genius, for they refuse to believe in the latter. It would seem that the beneficial results of the secret toil of the scholar are so distant that society is afraid to reckon with him in his lifetime; it prefers to satisfy its conscience by refusing to forgive his destitution or his misfortunes.

Despite his constant forgetfulness of the present, if Balthazar Claes laid aside his mysterious contemplations, if some genial, sociable idea enlivened that thoughtful face, if his staring eyes lost their rigid gleam in order to express a human sentiment, if he returned to real life and looked about him, it was difficult to avoid doing involuntary homage to the fascinating beauty of that face, to the gracious intelligence therein depicted. So it was that everyone who saw him at such times regretted that that man no longer belonged to the world, saying:

“He must have been very handsome in his youth!”

A vulgar error! Balthazar Claes had never been a more poetic figure than he was at that moment. Lavater would surely have liked to study that face instinct with patience, with Flemish honesty, with outspoken morality, in which everything was on a broad, grand scale, in which passion seemed calm because it was strong. His morals must have been pure, his word was sacred, his friendship seemed

unswerving, his devotion should have been unre-served; but the determination which employs those qualities to the profit of the family, the fatherland, or the world had inexorably taken a different direction. That citizen, whose duty it was to promote the welfare of a family, to manage a fortune, to guide his children toward a noble future, lived outside of his duties and his affections, in commerce with some familiar spirit. To a priest he would have seemed to be filled with the word of God, an artist would have hailed him as a great master, an enthusiast would have taken him for a seer of the Swedenborgian Church.

The dilapidated, uncouth, shabby costume which that man wore when he entered the room formed a striking contrast to the dainty refinement of the woman who gazed at him in such sorrowful admiration. Deformed persons who have a shrewd intellect or a beautiful soul always dress with exquisite taste. Either they wear a simple costume, realizing that their charm consists entirely in their mental qualities, or they have the art of making one forget their physical imperfections by a cunning, dainty elegance in matters of detail, which attracts the eye and occupies the mind. Not only had that woman a noble soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that womanly instinct which affords a foretaste of the intelligence of the angels. Reared in the midst of one of the most illustrious families of Belgium, she would have acquired good taste there if she had not already possessed it; but, enlightened by the desire

to be always attractive to the man she loved, she was able to dress in admirable taste, while at the same time her costume was never incongruous with her two deformities. Indeed, she had no physical defect above her waist except that one of her shoulders was perceptibly larger than the other.

She looked through the windows into the interior courtyard, then into the garden, as if to make sure that she was alone with Balthazar, and said to him, in a soft voice, with a look overflowing with the submissiveness which distinguishes Flemish wives, for, between them, love had long since put to flight the pride of Spanish grandeeship :

“Are you so very busy, Balthazar? this is the thirty-third Sunday that you have been neither to mass nor to vespers.”

Claes did not reply; his wife hung her head, folded her hands, and waited; she knew that his silence denoted neither contempt nor disdain, but tyrannical preoccupation. Balthazar was one of those men who retain for years in the depths of the heart their youthful delicacy of feeling; he would have deemed it a crime to express the slightest thought likely to wound a woman overwhelmed by the consciousness of her physical deformity. He alone, perhaps, among men knew that a word, a glance, may wipe out years of happiness, and are the more cruel in proportion as they offer a greater contrast to constant gentleness of manner; for our nature leads us to feel more pain because of a discordant note in our felicity, than pleasure because of

a momentary joy in misfortune. After a few moments, Balthazar seemed to wake, looked quickly about him, and said:

“Vespers?—Ah! the children are at vespers?”

He stepped forward to look into the garden, where magnificent tulips were growing on all sides; but he suddenly stopped as if he had come in collision with a wall, and cried:

“Why do they not combine in a stated time?”

“Can he be going mad?” said his wife to herself in profound alarm.

In order to give greater interest to the scene to which this situation led, it is indispensable to cast a glance upon the previous life of Balthazar Claes and the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

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About the year 1783, Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, at that time twenty-two years of age, might have passed for what we in France call a *bel homme*. He had just finished his education at Paris, where he learned excellent manners in the society of Madame Egmont, Count Horn, the Prince of Arenberg, the Spanish ambassador, Helvetius, and divers Frenchmen of Belgian origin, or persons who had come to France from that country and who were entitled by birth or fortune to be reckoned among the grand seigneurs who at that period were the arbiters of fashion. Young Claes found there some kinsmen and friends who gave him a start in the first society just as that first society was tottering to its fall; but, like most young men, he was more attracted at first by learning and renown than by vanity. He sought the society of scholars, therefore, and more particularly of Lavoisier, who at that time commended himself to public notice far more by reason of his vast fortune as a farmer-general than by his discoveries in chemistry; whereas at a later period the great chemist was destined to cause the petty farmer-general to be forgotten.

Balthazar conceived a passionate admiration for the science which Lavoisier affected, and became his most enthusiastic disciple; but he was young, as handsome as Helvetius, and the ladies of Paris

soon taught him to distil naught but wit and love. Although he had embraced his studies with ardor, although Lavoisier had accorded him some words of praise, he abandoned his master to listen to the mistresses of taste in whose classes young men were accustomed to take their last lessons in breeding and to adapt themselves to the customs of the first society, which forms a single family throughout Europe. The intoxicating dream of success was of brief duration; after a breath of the air of Paris, Balthazar left the city, fatigued by a vain existence which suited neither his enthusiastic mind nor his loving heart. The tranquil, pleasant domestic life which came to his mind at the mere name of Flanders seemed to him better adapted to his character and the ambitions of his heart. The gilded splendors of Parisian salons had failed to efface the harmonious tints of the dark parlor and of the little garden where his childhood had passed so happily. One must have neither home nor native land to remain in Paris. Paris is the city of the cosmopolite or of men who have espoused the world and who embrace it incessantly with the arms of science, art, or power.

The child of Flanders returned to Douai like La Fontaine's pigeon to its nest; he wept with joy when he entered the town on the day when Gayant walked abroad. Gayant, the superstitious good-luck of the whole town, the triumph of Flemish souvenirs, had appeared at the time of the emigration of his family to Douai. The death of his father and mother had left Claes House deserted, and kept him busy there for

some time. When the first grief was passed, he felt the need of a wife to consummate the happy existence all the sacredness of which had again possessed his thoughts; he chose to follow in the path of domestic traditions by seeking a wife, as his ancestors had done, at Ghent or Bruges or Antwerp; but no one of the women whom he met in those places suited him. Doubtless he had some peculiar ideas concerning marriage, for, even in his youth, he was accused of not walking in the beaten track. One day, in the house of one of his relatives at Ghent, he heard something said about a young lady from Brussels, who became the subject of a lively discussion. Some maintained that Mademoiselle de Temninck's beauty was nullified by her deformities; others considered that she was perfect, notwithstanding her defects. Balthazar Claes's old cousin informed his guests that, beautiful or not, she had a heart which would lead him to seek her hand if he were single; and he told how she had renounced her share in the inheritance of her mother and father in order to enable her young brother to make an alliance worthy of his name, thus preferring her brother's happiness to her own and sacrificing her whole life to him. It was not to be supposed that Mademoiselle de Temninck would find a husband, now that she was old and without fortune, when, as a young heiress, she had had no suitors. A few days later, Balthazar Claes sought the hand of Mademoiselle de Temninck, then twenty-five years of age, having fallen violently in love with her. Joséphine de Temninck believed that she was the

object of a mere caprice, and refused to listen to Monsieur Claes; but passion is so contagious, and a love inspired in a young and handsome man presents such great seductions to a poor, deformed, lame girl, that she consented to receive his attentions.

Nothing less than a whole book would suffice to describe in adequate terms the love of a young woman humbly submissive to the public opinion which pronounces her ugly, while she feels within herself the irresistible charm which genuine sentiments produce. It imports fierce jealousy at the sight of another's happiness, cruel dreams of vengeance upon the rival who steals a glance,—in a word, emotions, terrors which are unknown to the majority of women, and which would lose effect by merely being pointed out. Doubt, so dramatic in love, lies at the root of this essentially searching analysis, in which certain hearts find anew the lost but not forgotten poesy of their first distresses: those moments of sublime exaltation in the depths of the heart, which the face never betrays; that fear of not being understood, and the boundless joy of finding that one has been; those vacillations of the soul that falls back upon itself and those magnetic impulses that impart such an endless variety of shades to the eyes; those thoughts of suicide aroused by a word and dissipated by an inflection of the voice as far-reaching as the sentiment whose misapprehended persistency it discloses; those trembling glances which serve as a veil for astounding audacity; those sudden longings to speak and act, restrained by their very violence; that secret

eloquence which manifests itself in sentences without deep meaning, but uttered in an agitated voice; the mysterious effects of that primitive modesty of soul, and that divine reserve, which make one generous in the darkness, and cause one to discover an exquisite relish in unknown deeds of self-sacrifice; in fact, all the beauties of youthful love and the weaknesses of its power.

Mademoiselle Joséphine de Temninck was a coquette from grandeur of soul. The consciousness of her apparent imperfections made her as exacting as the loveliest of women could have been. The fear of being found unattractive some day awoke her pride, destroyed her confidence, and gave her courage to keep in the depths of her heart those first joys which other women love to publish by their manners, and which they proudly wear as a decoration. The more violently love impelled her toward Balthazar, the less she dared to give expression to her feelings. The gesture, the glance, the question or the reply, which, in a pretty woman, are flattering to a man, became in her case humiliating speculations. A beautiful woman can be herself without anxiety, the world always awards her credit for a foolish remark or an awkward gesture; whereas a single glance arrests the noblest expression on an ugly woman's lips, terrifies her eyes, adds to the ill-grace of her movements, embarrasses her demeanor. She knows that she alone is forbidden to make mistakes, for everyone denies her the power to repair them, and, furthermore, no one ever gives

her an opportunity. The necessity of being perfect every instant is certain to deaden the faculties, to impede their exercise. Such a woman cannot live except in an atmosphere of angelic indulgence. Where are the hearts from which indulgence overflows, untinged by bitter and insulting compassion?

Such thoughts as these, which the repellent courtesies of the world had made familiar to her, and the considerate attentions which are more offensive than insults, because they aggravate misfortunes by calling attention to them, oppressed Mademoiselle de Temninck, were to her a constant source of embarrassment which forced back into the depths of her heart her most delightful impressions, and imparted coldness to her manner, her words, her expression. She was amorous by stealth, but dared not be eloquent or beautiful except in solitude. Unhappy in broad daylight, she would have been fascinating if it had been possible for her to live only at night. Often, for the purpose of testing Balthazar's love, and at the risk of losing it, she disdained the aid of dress, which partly atoned for her deformities. Her Spanish eyes were bewitchingly beautiful when she saw that he considered her lovely in *négligé* attire. Nevertheless, distrust poisoned her happiness on the rare occasions when she ventured to abandon herself to happiness. She asked herself if Claes were not seeking her hand in order to have a slave in his house, if he had not some secret imperfections which compelled him to be content with a poor, deformed girl. These constantly recurring anxieties gave immeasurable value

to the hours when she believed in the sincerity and constancy of a love which was to avenge her upon society. She provoked discussions on delicate subjects, exaggerating her ugliness, in order to penetrate to the lowest depths of her lover's conscience, and extorted from Balthazar truths that were far from flattering; but she loved his embarrassment when she had led him on to say that what one loved in woman was, before all else, a lovely mind, and the devotion which makes one's days so constantly happy that, after a few years of married life, the loveliest woman on earth is, in a husband's eyes, synonymous with the ugliest. After piling up all the truths to be found in the paradoxes which tend to decry the worth of beauty, Balthazar would suddenly awake to the discourtesy of those propositions, and would display all the goodness of his heart in the delicacy of the transitions by which he would succeed in proving to Mademoiselle de Temninck that she was perfect in his eyes. Self-sacrifice, which in woman may, perhaps, be called the crowning point of love, was not lacking in her, for she had no thought of being always loved; but the prospect of a struggle in which sentiment might carry the day over beauty tempted her; moreover, there seemed to her to be a touch of grandeur in giving herself without believing in love; and, lastly, happiness, however brief its duration, was likely to cost her so dear that she could not refuse to taste it. These uncertainties, these combats, infecting that superior creature with the charm of passion and its

unexpectedness, inspired Balthazar with an almost chivalrous love.

The marriage took place early in 1795. The husband and wife returned to Douai to pass the first days of their wedded life in the patriarchal house of the Claes family, its treasures being increased by Mademoiselle de Temninck, who contributed several fine pictures by Murillo and Velasquez, her mother's diamonds, and the superb presents sent her by her brother, now Duke of Casa-Real. Few wives were happier than Madame Claes. Her happiness lasted fifteen years, without the slightest cloud; and it found its way, like a bright light, into the trivial details of existence. Most men have inequalities of disposition which produce constant discords; thus they deprive their home life of that harmony which is the beau-ideal of a happy household; for most men are afflicted with a strain of pettiness, and pettiness leads to bickering. One will be upright and energetic, but stern and rough-mannered; another will be kind-hearted but obstinate; this one will love his wife, but will have a vacillating will; that one, engrossed by ambition, will discharge his sentiments as a debt; although he confers the vanities that fortune carries in its train, he takes away every-day enjoyment; in short, most men in the social sphere are essentially incomplete, without being notably blameworthy. Men of intellect are as variable as barometers, genius alone is kindly in its essence. So it is that pure happiness is found at the two extremities of the moral scale. Only the

good-natured idiot and the man of genius are capable, the one through weakness, the other through strength, of that even disposition, of that constant gentleness, in which the asperities of life melt away. In the one, it is indifference and passive submission; in the other, it is indulgence and continuity of the sublime thought of which it is the interpreter; and which must resemble itself in principle no less than in the application thereof. Both are equally simple and ingenuous: only in the one, it is emptiness; in the other, depth. So that shrewd women are strongly inclined to take an idiot as the best substitute for a great man.

Balthazar at first displayed his superior character in the most trivial details of life. He chose to look upon conjugal love as a superb creation, and, like all men of lofty vision who can endure nothing imperfect, he wished to unfold all its beauties. His wit constantly varied the tranquil monotony of happiness, his noble character stamped his attentions with the seal of grace. Hence, although he believed in the philosophical principles of the eighteenth century, he harbored a Catholic priest in his house until 1801, despite the risks that he ran under the revolutionary laws, in order not to disappoint the fanatical Spanish attachment to Roman Catholicism which his wife had imbibed with her mother's milk; and, when that form of worship was re-established in France, he accompanied his wife to mass every Sunday. His attachment never laid aside the outward forms of passion. He never put forth in

his household that protecting strength which women like so well, because, in relation to his wife, it would have seemed like pity. In short, with the most ingenious flattery, he treated her as his equal and indulged from time to time in one of the amiable pets in which a man ventures to indulge with a lovely woman, as if to defy her superiority. His lips were always embellished by the smile of happiness, and his words always overflowed with gentleness. He loved his Joséphine for her sake and for his own, with that ardor which implies constant praise of a wife's good qualities and charms. Fidelity, often the result of a social principle, of religion, or of calculation in husbands, seemed instinctive in him, and was accompanied by the sweet flatteries of the springtime of love. Duty was the only obligation of marriage which was unknown to those two equally loving creatures, for Balthazar Claes found in Mademoiselle de Temninck a complete and never-failing realization of his hopes. In him the heart was always sated without fatigue, and the man always happy.

Not only did the Spanish blood do its perfect work in the granddaughter of the Casa-Reals, and make the science of varying pleasure *ad infinitum* instinctive in her, but she also possessed that unbounded devotion which is the genius of her sex, as grace is all its beauty. Her love was a blind fanaticism which would have caused her to go joyously forth to death at a single nod of his head. Balthazar's delicacy of feeling had exalted in her the most generous

sentiments of her sex, and aroused an imperious longing to give more than she received. This mutual exchange of happiness which they lavished alternately upon each other, plainly established the principle of her life outside of her person, and caused an ever-growing love to manifest itself in her words, her glances, her acts. On both sides, gratitude made fruitful and varied the heart's life; just as the certainty that they were all in all to each other excluded all pettiness by magnifying the smallest accessories of existence.

Furthermore, is not the deformed woman who is straight in her husband's eyes, the lame woman whom a man would not have other than she is, or the mature woman who seems young, the happiest creature in all the world of women? Human passion can go no further than that. The glory of woman consists in compelling adoration of what seems a defect in her. To forget that a lame woman does not walk straight is the illusion of a moment; but to love her because she is lame is to deify her imperfection. Perhaps this sentence should be written in the Gospel of women: *Blessed are the imperfectly made, for theirs is the kingdom of love.* Surely beauty is likely to prove a misfortune to a woman, for that ephemeral flower counts for too much in the passion she inspires; a man loves a beautiful woman as he marries a wealthy heiress. But the love kindled or manifested by a woman deprived of the insecure advantage after which the sons of Adam run, is the true love, the truly

mysterious passion, the fervent embrace of souls, the sentiment that never knows its day of disenchantment. Such a woman possesses charms unknown to the world, whose yoke she casts aside, she is beautiful at the proper time, and she reaps too much glory by compelling forgetfulness of her imperfections, not to be always successful in so doing. So we find that almost all the most famous passions in history have been inspired by women in whom the ordinary man would have discovered defects. Cleopatra, Joanna of Naples, Diane de Poitiers, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Madame de Pompadour, in fact, most of the women whom love has made famous lacked neither imperfections nor infirmities; whereas most of the women whose beauty is said to have been without imperfection have lived to see their loves end unhappily. This anomaly must have a cause. Perhaps man lives by sentiment rather than by pleasure? perhaps the wholly physical charm of a beautiful woman has limits, while the essentially moral charm of a woman of moderate beauty is infinite? Is not this the moral upon which the *Thousand and One Nights* rest? An ugly woman as the wife of Henry VIII. would have defied the axe and overcome the inconstancy of her lord and master.

By an anomaly readily explained in a young woman of Spanish origin, Madame Claes was uneducated. She knew how to read and write, but, up to the age of twenty, when her parents took her from the convent, she had read none but ascetic works. On entering society, she thirsted at first

for the pleasures of society, and learned only the useless acquirements of the toilet; but she was so deeply humiliated by her ignorance, that she dared not take part in any conversation; so that she was considered to have but little intelligence. That education in mystic lore had resulted, however, in leaving her sentiments in their full strength, and had not impaired her natural wit. Stupid and ugly as an heiress in the eyes of the world, she became clever and beautiful for her husband. Balthazar did his best, during the first years of their married life, to impart to his wife such accomplishments as she required to stand well in society; but it was evidently too late, she remembered only with the heart. Joséphine forgot nothing of what Claes told her with regard to themselves; she remembered the least important details of her happy life, but forgot the lesson of one day before the morrow.

Such ignorance would have caused much discord between other husbands and wives; but Madame Claes was endowed with so artless a comprehension of passion, she loved her husband so piously, so devotedly, and the desire to retain her happiness made her so clever, that she always managed to seem to understand, and the moments were very rare when she allowed her ignorance to be too evident. Moreover, when two persons love each other so dearly that every day is to them as the first day of their passion, there exist in that fruitful happiness phenomena which change all the conditions of life. It becomes like a sort of childhood,

heedless of everything that is not laughter, joy, pleasure. And then, when life is very active, when its fires burn very brightly, man allows the combustion to go on without thinking of it or opposing it, without measuring means or end. Never, by the way, did one of Eve's daughters understand better than Madame Claes the duties of a wife. She had that submissive nature, characteristic of the Flemish woman, which makes the domestic fireside so attractive, and to which her Spanish pride gave a keener relish. She was imposing, could command respect by a glance in which the consciousness of her worth and her nobility was clearly reflected; but before Claes she trembled; and she had at last reached a point where she placed him so high and so near to God, viewing every act of her life and her most trivial thoughts in their relation to him, that her love was always tinged with a respectful fear which made it still deeper. She adopted with pride all the habits of the Flemish burgher class, and staked her self-esteem upon making their home life comfortable and happy, maintaining the classic neatness of the household in the smallest details, possessing only those things which were absolutely good, supplying the table with the most appetizing dishes, and making everything in her house harmonize with the life of their hearts.

They had two sons and two daughters. The oldest, Marguerite, was born in 1796. The last child was a boy, three years old, and named Jean-Balthazar. The sentiment of motherhood in Madame Claes was

almost equal to her love for her husband. So that there took place in her heart, especially during the last part of her life, a terrible battle between those two equally powerful sentiments, one of which had, in a certain sense, become the enemy of the other. Her tears and the terror stamped upon her face at the moment when the curtain rises upon the domestic drama hovering over that peaceable household were caused by the fear that she had sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805, Madame Claes's brother died childless. The Spanish law forbade the sister's succession to the territorial possessions which formed the appanage of the family title; but, by his will, the duke bequeathed her about sixty thousand ducats, of which the heirs of the collateral branch did not attempt to deprive her. Although the sentiment which united her to Balthazar Claes was of such a nature that no thought of self-interest had ever sullied it, Joséphine felt a sort of satisfaction in the possession of a fortune equal to her husband's, and was overjoyed to be able to offer him something after having, with such noble dignity, accepted everything from him. And so chance willed that that marriage, which calculating minds looked upon as madness, turned out an excellent one even from a financial standpoint.

The use to be made of that sum was difficult to determine. Claes House was so abundantly supplied with furniture, pictures, objects of art and of value, that it seemed hardly possible to add to the

store anything worthy of a place beside what it already contained. The good taste of the family had accumulated genuine treasures. One generation had devoted itself to the search for fine pictures; then the necessity of completing the collection that generation had begun made the taste for painting hereditary. The hundred or more pictures which adorned the gallery connecting the house in the rear with the reception-rooms on the first floor of the house in front, as well as some fifty others hung in the chief salons, had required three centuries of patient research. There were celebrated examples of Rubens, Ruysdael, Van Dyck, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouwermans, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. The Italian and French pictures were in the minority, but all were authentic and of the first importance. Another generation had had a fancy for Chinese or Japanese porcelain services. One Claes was passionately fond of furniture, another of silverware; in short, each of them had had his special mania, his craze, one of the most marked features of the Flemish character. Balthazar's father, the last relic of the famous Dutch society, had left one of the finest collections of tulips ever known.

In addition to these hereditary treasures, which represented an enormous capital and furnished the old house magnificently,—a house as simple externally as a shell, but a shell arrayed in the richest and most brilliant colors within,—Balthazar Claes owned a country house in the plain of Orchies.

Instead of basing his expenses on his income, as the French do, he had followed the old Dutch custom of spending only a fourth of it; and twelve hundred ducats a year brought his expenses to the level of those of the wealthiest people in the town. The publication of the Civil Code justified his prudence. The title *successions*, providing for the equal division of property, was likely to leave each child poor, and at some time to disperse the treasure of the old Claes museum. Balthazar, by agreement with Madame Claes, invested her fortune in such a way as to give each of their children a position similar to the father's. The Claes family therefore persisted in its modest mode of life and purchased forests which had been somewhat maltreated by the wars which had taken place, but which, if carefully preserved, would become enormously valuable in ten years.

The first society of Douai, to which Monsieur Claes belonged, had so thoroughly appreciated his wife's noble character and excellent qualities, that, by a sort of tacit agreement, she was exempted from the social duties to which provincials attach so much importance. During the winter season, which she passed in the city, she went rarely into society, and society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three large dinner-parties a month. Everyone realized that she was more at ease in her own house, to which she was confined, moreover, by her passion for her husband and the care demanded by the education of her children.

Such was, up to 1809, the course of affairs in that household, utterly at variance with all received ideas. The life of those two, secretly overflowing with love and joy, was externally like the lives of their fellow-creatures. Balthazar Claes's passion for his wife, which his wife knew how to perpetuate, seemed, as he himself remarked, to employ its inborn constancy in cultivating happiness, which was quite as well worth while as the cultivation of tulips, toward which he had been inclined from his childhood, and relieved him from the necessity of having his mania, as each of his ancestors had had.

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Toward the end of that year, Balthazar's mind and manners underwent a deplorable change, which began so naturally that at first Madame Claes did not think it necessary to ask him the cause of it. One night her husband went to bed in a preoccupied state which she felt it to be her duty to respect. Her woman's delicacy and her habit of submission had led her to await Balthazar's confidences, for his trust in her was guaranteed by an affection so true that it afforded no foothold for her jealousy. Although she was sure to obtain a reply whenever she should venture to ask an inquisitive question, she had always retained, as a result of her first impressions of life, the fear of a refusal. Moreover, her husband's moral malady had well-defined phases, and progressed by steps gradually increasing in length to the intolerable violence which destroyed the happiness of her home. However engrossed Balthazar might be, he continued, none the less, for several months, to be talkative and affectionate, and the change in his disposition manifested itself only by frequent fits of abstraction. Madame Claes hoped for a long while to learn from her husband the secret of his labors; perhaps he preferred not to avow it until the moment when they were about to end in satisfactory results, for many men have a species of

pride which impels them to conceal their struggles and not to appear until they have won the victory. On the day of triumph, therefore, domestic happiness was sure to reappear, all the more resplendent because Balthazar would notice that hiatus in his life of love, which his heart would doubtless disavow.

Joséphine knew her husband well enough to be certain that he would never forgive himself for having made his Pépita less happy than usual for several months. So she held her peace, conscious of a sort of joy in suffering through him, for him; for her passion had a shade of that Spanish piety which never separates faith from love, and does not understand profound sentiment unaccompanied by suffering. She waited for his affection to return, saying to herself every night: "It will come tomorrow!" and thinking of her happiness as of an absent friend. Her last child was conceived in the midst of these secret anxieties. Ghastly revelation of a future sorrow! At that time, love was, as it were, among her husband's distractions, but a distraction more powerful than the others. Her womanly pride, wounded for the first time, caused her to measure the depth of the unknown abyss which separated her forever from the Claes of the earlier years. From that moment, Balthazar's condition grew worse. That man, who but a short time before was constantly immersed in domestic joys, who played with his children for hours at a time, rolled with them on the parlor floor, or on the paths in the garden, and seemed to live only under his Pépita's black eyes, did not

notice his wife's condition, forgot to live *en famille*, forgot himself.

The longer Madame Claes postponed asking him the cause of his preoccupation, the less she dared do it. At the thought, her blood rushed madly through her veins and her voice failed her. At last, she concluded that she was no longer attractive to her husband, and thereupon she became seriously alarmed. That fear engrossed her thoughts, drove her to despair, excited her, became the cause of many melancholy hours and mournful reveries. She justified Balthazar at her own expense, accusing herself of being old and ugly; then she detected a generous thought, although humiliating to her, in the constant labor by means of which he maintained a negative fidelity, and sought to restore her freedom by tacitly assenting to one of those secret divorces which explain the happiness that many families seem to enjoy. Nevertheless, before bidding farewell to conjugal life, she tried to read the depths of that heart, but she found it closed. She saw that Balthazar insensibly became indifferent to all that he had loved, neglected his flowering tulips, and ceased to think of his children. Doubtless he was given over to some passion, outside of the affections of the heart, to be sure, but tending none the less, as viewed by women, to wither the heart. Love had gone to sleep but had not flown away. Even if that were a consolation, her unhappiness was none the less real.

The long duration of that crisis is explained by a single word, hope, the key to all such conjugal

situations. When the poor woman reached a degree of despair which inspired her with courage to question her husband, then, and not till then, did she again know happy moments, during which Balthazar proved to her that, although he was under the spell of some diabolical thought, it permitted him at times to become himself once more. During those moments when her sky grew brighter, she was too eager to enjoy her happiness to annoy him by her importunities; and then, when she had summoned courage to question him, at the very moment when she was about to speak, he would escape from her, leave her abruptly, or fall once more into the abyss of his meditations, from which nothing could entice him.

Ere long the reaction of the mental system upon the physical began its ravages, imperceptible at first, but visible none the less to the eyes of a loving wife who followed her husband's secret thought in its slightest manifestations. Often she had difficulty in restraining her tears when she watched him, after dinner, buried in an easy-chair by the hearth, gloomy and pensive, his eyes fixed upon a dark panel, regardless of the silence that reigned all about him. She remarked with terror the gradual alterations which impaired the beauty of that face which love had made sublime for her; day by day, the life of the soul withdrew from it more and more, and the framework was left without any expression. Sometimes the eyes had a vitreous look, it seemed as if the sight were turning inward and searching the mind. When the children had gone to bed, if

poor Pépita, her mind filled with horrible thoughts, sometimes ventured to ask after hours of silence and solitude: "Aren't you feeling well, dear?" Balthazar would not reply; or, if he did reply, he would come to himself with a start like a man suddenly awakened from sleep, and utter a dull, cavernous *no*, which fell like a heavy weight upon his trembling wife's heart.

Although she would have liked to conceal from her friends the curious situation in which she found herself, she was, nevertheless, obliged to speak of it. According to the custom prevalent in small towns, Balthazar's apparent derangement had already become a subject of conversation in most salons, and in some circles certain details were known of which Madame Claes was entirely ignorant. And so, notwithstanding the reserve enjoined by politeness, some of her friends displayed such keen anxiety that she made haste to justify her husband's peculiar conduct.

"Monsieur Balthazar," she said, "has undertaken a very important work which engrosses his whole time and thought, but which, if successful, will bring glory to his family and to his country."

That mysterious explanation was so flattering to the ambition of a town in which love of country and desire for its pre-eminence are more intense than in any other, that it could not fail to produce in men's minds a reaction favorable to Monsieur Claes. His wife's conclusions were, up to a certain point, well-founded. Several mechanics of various trades had been working for a long while in the garret of the

house in front, whither Balthazar betook himself early in the morning. After making his visits there longer and longer, until his wife and servants had gradually become accustomed to them, Balthazar at last began to stay there all day. But Madame Claes learned through the humiliating confidences of her kind friends, who were amazed at her ignorance,—and a terrible grief it was to her!—that her husband was constantly purchasing in Paris physical instruments, valuable substances, books, apparatus, and was ruining himself, they said, searching for the philosopher's stone. She ought to think of her children, her friends added, and of her own future; it would be criminal for her not to exert her influence to turn her husband aside from the false path upon which he had started.

Although Madame Claes summoned her imposing, *grande dame* manner to put an end to these absurd speeches, she was terror-stricken despite her apparent self-assurance, and determined to lay aside her rôle of self-abnegation. She led up to one of those situations during which a woman is on a footing of equality with her husband; less fearful thus, she ventured to ask Balthazar the reason of his change of manner and the explanation of his constant seclusion. The Fleming frowned and answered:

“My dear, you would not understand.”

One day, Joséphine insisted upon knowing the secret, complaining gently that she was not allowed to share all the thoughts of him whose life she shared.

“Since you are so deeply interested,” replied Balthazar, taking his wife on his knees and kissing her black hair, “I will tell you that I have taken up chemistry again, and I am the happiest man on earth.”

Two years after the winter when Monsieur Claes had turned chemist, his house had changed its aspect. Whether society was offended at the scientist's incessant absent-mindedness or was afraid of annoying him, or whether Madame Claes's secret anxieties had made her less agreeable, she no longer saw any but her most intimate friends. Balthazar went nowhere, shut himself up in his laboratory during the whole day, sometimes remained there at night, and appeared in the bosom of his family only at the dinner-hour. The second year he did not go to his country house in summer, and his wife was unwilling to live there alone. Sometimes Balthazar left the house and did not return until the next day, leaving Madame Claes a prey to mortal anxiety for a whole night; after causing a fruitless search to be made for him from end to end of a town where the gates were closed at night according to the custom in fortified places, she could not send into the country after him. So that the unhappy woman had not even the hope blended with anguish which suspense causes, but must suffer until the morning. Balthazar, who had forgotten at what hour the gates were closed, would calmly appear the next day, without a suspicion of the torture his absent-mindedness must have inflicted on his family; and the joy

of seeing him again was to his wife a source of agitation as dangerous as her apprehensions; she would say nothing, afraid to question him, for when she did venture to question him the first time, he replied, with an air of surprise:

“Well, well! can't I take a walk?”

The passions cannot deceive. So that Madame Claes's anxiety confirmed the reports she had taken pleasure in contradicting. Her youth had accustomed her to the polite compassion of society; in order not to undergo it a second time, she confined herself more closely than ever within the four walls of her house, which everybody deserted, even her closest friends. Slovenliness in dress, always so degrading in a man of culture and station, became so marked in Balthazar that it was not the least poignant of the many causes of unhappiness by which his wife was beset, accustomed as she was to the exquisite neatness of the Flemings. In concert with Lemulquinier, her husband's valet, Joséphine repaired for some time the daily dilapidation of his clothes, but she had to abandon the undertaking. On the very day when, unknown to Balthazar, new garments had been substituted for those which were soiled or torn, he made rags of them.

That woman, who had been perfectly happy for fifteen years, and whose jealousy had never been aroused, suddenly discovered that she had apparently ceased to count for anything in the heart where she lately held sway. Spanish by descent, the sentiment natural to Spanish women made itself

heard in her when she detected a rival in the science which took her husband from her; the torments of jealousy tore her heart and added fuel to her love. But what could she do against science? how could she combat its constantly increasing, tyrannical power? how slay an invisible rival? How can a woman, whose power is limited by nature, contend against an idea whose delights are infinite and its attractions always new? To what could she resort to neutralize the coquetry of ideas, which renew their freshness and beauty in difficulties, and lead a man so far from the world that he forgets even his most cherished affections?

At last, one day, notwithstanding the strict orders Balthazar had given, his wife determined that, at all events, she would not leave him, that she would shut herself up with him in the garret where he passed his time, and would fight hand to hand with her rival, assisting her husband during the long hours that he lavished upon that redoubtable mistress. She determined to insinuate herself secretly into that mysterious workshop of seduction, and to acquire the right to remain there always. She attempted, therefore, to share with Lemulquinier the right to enter the laboratory; but, in order that he might not be a witness of the quarrel which she dreaded, she waited until a day when her husband dispensed with the services of his valet. For some time she had been watching the servant's goings and comings with wrathful impatience. Did not he know all that she wished to know, all that

her husband concealed from her, all that she dared not ask him? she considered that Lemulquinier was preferred to her, to her, the wife!

She went to the garret, therefore, trembling with excitement and almost happy; but, for the first time in her life, she knew Balthazar's wrath. She had hardly opened the door, when he rushed at her, seized her, and pushed her roughly back into the hall, where she nearly fell from top to bottom of the stairs.

"God be praised, you are still alive!" cried Balthazar, raising her from the floor.

A glass mask had broken and fallen in a thousand pieces over Madame Claes, who saw that her husband was deadly pale with terror.

"My dear, I forbade your coming here," he said, sitting down on the top stair like a man completely crushed. "The saints have preserved you from death. What happy chance made me look at the door? We were both nearly killed."

"I should have been very happy if we had been," she said.

"My experiment has failed," rejoined Balthazar. "I could forgive nobody but you for the grief that this disappointment causes me. I was just on the point of decomposing nitrogen, perhaps!—Come, go back to your household affairs."

Balthazar returned to his laboratory.

"*I was just on the point of decomposing nitrogen, perhaps!*" said the poor woman to herself, as she returned to her bedroom, where she burst into tears.

That phrase was meaningless to her. Men, whose

education accustoms them to think of anything as possible, have no idea how horrible it is for a woman to be unable to understand the thoughts of the man whom she loves. The divine creatures, more indulgent than we, say nothing to us when we misunderstand the language of their hearts; they fear to make us feel the superiority of their sentiments, and they conceal their suffering with as much joy as they take in saying nothing of their misunderstood pleasures; but, being more ambitious in love than we, they long to marry something more than a man's heart, they crave his whole mind as well. In Madame Claes's heart, the thought that she knew nothing of the science in which her husband was absorbed engendered an irritation more intense than that caused by the beauty of a rival. A struggle between woman and woman gives her who loves best the advantage of loving better; but that irritation implied impotence, and humiliated all the feelings which help us to live. Joséphine did not know! A situation had arisen wherein her ignorance separated her from her husband. And, last and keenest torture of all, he was often between life and death, he incurred constant risks, far from her, yet near at hand, and she did not share them, did not know what they were! It was, like hell, a mental prison, issueless, hopeless. Madame Claes determined, at all events, to understand the attractions of that science, and began to study chemistry secretly in books. Thus the family lived in a cloister to all intent.

Such were the successive phases through which misfortune compelled the Claes family to pass before bringing upon it the species of civil death with which it was stricken at the moment when this narrative opens.

New complications arose in that wretched condition of affairs. Like all passionate women, Madame Claes was disinterested and unselfish to an abnormal degree. They who love truly, know of how little importance money is compared with sentiment, and with how great difficulty it is amassed. Nevertheless, it was not without painful emotion that Joséphine learned that her husband owed three hundred thousand francs raised by mortgaging his real estate. The undoubted genuineness of the documents justified the perplexities, the rumors, the conjectures of the town. Madame Claes, justly alarmed, was compelled, proud as she was, to question her husband's notary, to admit him to the secret of her sorrows, or to allow him to guess them, and to hear at last this humiliating question :

“How is it that Monsieur Claes has not yet told you anything about it?”

Luckily, Balthazar's notary was almost a kinsman,—in this way. Monsieur Claes's grandfather had married a Pierquin of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai. Since that marriage, the latter, although unconnected with the Claes, had treated them as cousins. Monsieur Pierquin, a young man of twenty-six, who had recently succeeded to his father's office, was the only person

admitted to Claes House. Madame Balthazar had lived in such complete solitude for many months, that the notary was obliged to confirm the report she had heard of the catastrophe, which was already known to the whole town. He told her that her husband probably owed a large sum to the house which supplied him with chemical substances. After making inquiries as to Monsieur Claes's means and reputation, that house gladly accepted his orders and forwarded the goods without any question, notwithstanding the size of their account. Madame Claes instructed Pierquin to obtain a statement of the supplies furnished her husband. Two months later, Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturers of chemicals, forwarded a statement amounting to one hundred thousand francs. Madame Claes and Pierquin studied that document with increasing surprise. Although many articles, expressed in scientific or commercial nomenclature, were unintelligible to them, they were appalled to find charges for shipments of metals and diamonds of all sorts, but in small quantities. The amount of the bill was easily explained by the multiplicity of articles, by the precautions demanded in the transportation of certain valuable substances and valuable apparatus, by the exorbitant price of certain products which could only be obtained with great difficulty, or whose rarity made them expensive, and, lastly, by the value of the physical and chemical instruments manufactured according to Monsieur Claes's instructions. The notary, in his cousin's interest, had made inquiries

concerning Protez and Chiffreville, and that firm's excellent reputation left no doubt as to their fair dealing with Monsieur Claes, to whom, moreover, they frequently communicated the results obtained by chemists in Paris, in order to save him unnecessary expense.

Madame Claes begged the notary to conceal from the people of Douai the nature of these purchases, which would seem to them evidence of insanity; but Pierquin replied that, in order not to impair the esteem in which Claes was held, he had already delayed till the last possible moment the issuance of the notarial documents which the importance of the sums lent on trust by his clients had at last necessitated. He explained to her the full extent of the difficulty, informing her that, unless she could find some way to prevent her husband from spending his fortune so foolishly, in six months his patrimony would be buried in mortgages far beyond its value. As for himself, he added, the suggestions he had made to his cousin, with the precautions due to a man so highly considered, had not had the slightest effect. Balthazar had answered once for all that he was working for the glory and fortune of his family. Thus, to all the tortures of the heart which Madame Claes had endured for two years, each of which combined with the others, and increased the sorrow of the moment with the weight of all the past sorrows, was now added a ghastly, never-ending dread, which made the future terrible to think of. Women have presentiments whose accuracy borders on the

miraculous. Why do they, as a general rule, fear more than they hope when the greatest interests of life are at stake? Why have they faith only with regard to the sublime religious ideas of the future? Why do they so skilfully foresee the catastrophes of fortune, or the crises of our destinies? It may be that the sentiment which unites them to the man they love enables them with wonderful precision to measure his powers, to estimate his faculties, to understand his passions, his tastes, his vices, his virtues; the constant study of those causes, with which they are brought face to face every hour in the day, doubtless gives them the fatal power to foresee their effects under all possible circumstances. What they see of the present enables them to forecast the future with a precision naturally explained by the perfection of their nervous system, which makes it possible for them to grasp the slightest diagnostic manifestations of the thought and the sentiments. Everything in them vibrates in unison with great moral commotions. Either they feel, or they see.

Now, Madame Claes, although separated from her husband for two years, had a presentiment of the loss of her fortune. She appreciated the deliberate enthusiasm, the unchangeable constancy of Balthazar's character; if it were true that he was trying to make gold, he was capable of throwing his last crust of bread into his crucible with perfect insensibility; but what was he seeking? Thus far the sentiment of maternity and conjugal love had been so perfectly blended in that woman's heart, that her

children, who were equally dear to herself and her husband, had never interposed between them. But suddenly she discovered that at times she was more mother than wife, although more frequently she was more wife than mother. And yet, however well disposed she might be to sacrifice her fortune, and even her children, to the happiness of the man who had chosen her, who had loved, adored her, and in whose eyes she was still the only woman on earth, the remorse caused by the weakness of her mother-love compelled her to choose between terrible alternatives. Thus, as wife, she suffered in her heart; as mother, she suffered in her children; as a Christian woman, she suffered for all. She held her peace, and confined those cruel tempests within her soul. Her husband, the sole arbiter of his family's fate, was able to arrange its destiny at his pleasure, he was responsible to God alone. Moreover, could she reproach him with the loss of his fortune, after the disinterestedness he had displayed during ten years? Was she competent to judge his plans? But her conscience, in accord with the law and with natural feeling, told her that parents were merely trustees of their wealth, and had no right to squander the material welfare of their children.

To avoid seeking a solution to those momentous questions, she preferred to close her eyes, as is the wont of those who refuse to see the abyss into whose depths they know that they are likely to fall. Her husband had given her no money for the household expenses for six months. She sent to

Paris and sold secretly there the magnificent diamonds that her brother gave her on her wedding-day, and introduced the strictest economy in the house. She sent away the governess who had charge of her children, and even Jean's nurse. Formerly the luxury of carriages was unknown to the bourgeoisie, who were at the same time exceedingly simple in their habits and exceedingly proud in their sentiments; so that no provision had been made in the Claes establishment for that modern invention; Balthazar was obliged to maintain his stable and carriage-house in a building on the opposite side of the street; his occupations no longer permitted him to superintend that essentially masculine branch of the establishment. Madame Claes did away with the onerous expense of carriages and servants whom her isolation rendered useless, and, notwithstanding the excellence of her reasons, she did not attempt to explain her reforms. Hitherto facts had given the lie to her words, and silence was thenceforth the most fitting course. The change in the mode of life of the Claes family admitted no justification in a country where, as is the case in Holland, the man who spends his whole income is looked upon as insane. But, as her oldest daughter Marguerite was approaching sixteen, Joséphine was supposed to entertain a wish to arrange a fine marriage for her, to obtain for her such a position in society as befitted a young woman allied to the Molinas, the Van Ostrom-Temnincks, and the Casa-Reals.

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A few days before that on which this narrative begins, the money received for the diamonds was exhausted. On that very day, at three o'clock, as Madame Claes was taking her children to vespers, she met Pierquin, who was on his way to see her and who accompanied her to Saint-Pierre, talking in a low tone concerning her position.

“Cousin,” he said, “I cannot, without proving false to the friendship which binds me to your family, refrain from pointing out to you the danger which threatens you, and urging you to confer with your husband. Who but you can stop him on the brink of the abyss which you are approaching? The income from the mortgaged property is not sufficient to pay the interest on the sums borrowed; so that you are without any income to-day. If you should cut the wood in the forests you own, you would deprive yourself of your only chance of salvation hereafter. My cousin Balthazar at this moment owes the house of Protez and Chiffreville of Paris thirty thousand francs; how will you pay them? what are you to live on? and what will become of you if Claes continues to order reagents, test-tubes, voltaic batteries, and other kickshaws? All your fortune, except the house and the furniture, has been squandered in gas and coal. When the subject of mortgaging his house was broached to Claes on the day before yesterday,

what do you suppose his answer was?—‘Damnation!’—That’s the first glimmering of common sense he has manifested in three years.’”

Madame Claes pressed Pierquin’s arm with an agonizing gesture, raised her eyes to Heaven, and said:

“Keep our secret!”

Notwithstanding her devout nature, the unhappy woman, overwhelmed by the crushing explicitness of those words, was unable to pray; she sat between her children, opened her book, and did not turn a leaf; she was absorbed in meditation as engrossing as her husband’s. Spanish honor, Flemish probity, spoke aloud in her heart in tones as powerful as those of the organ. The ruin of her children was consummated! Between them and their father’s honor she must not hesitate.

The necessity of a speedy conflict between her husband and herself terrified her; he was so great, so imposing in her eyes, that the mere thought of his wrath agitated her as intensely as the thought of the divine majesty. She must lay aside that constant submission which she had sacredly observed as a dutiful wife. The interests of her children compelled her to interfere with the tastes of a man whom she idolized. Again and again she would be obliged to bring him back to positive questions when he was soaring in the lofty regions of science, to tear him violently away from contemplation of a smiling future in order to bring him face to face with a mass of material details most offensive to artists

and great men. In her eyes, Balthazar Claes was a giant of science, a man big with renown; he could not have neglected her except for the most splendid hopes; and then he was blest with such profound good sense, she had heard him speak with so much ability on questions of every sort, that he must be sincere in saying that he was working for the glory and fortune of his family. That man's love for his wife and children was not simply immense, it was infinite. Those sentiments could not have been destroyed, they had doubtless become intensified, being reproduced in another form. She, so noble, so generous, and so timid, must needs assail that great man's ears incessantly with the word money and the jingle of money; point out to him the sores born of poverty, force him to listen to cries of distress, when he should be listening to the melodious voices of renown! Perhaps Balthazar's affection for her would grow less. If she had no children, she would have embraced courageously and with pleasure the new destiny her husband marked out for her. Women reared in opulence soon perceive the void which material pleasures conceal, and when their hearts, wearied rather than withered, have brought them the happiness caused by the constant exchange of genuine sentiments, they do not recoil at the prospect of life in moderate circumstances, if such a life is satisfactory to the man to whom they know that they are dear. Their ideas, their pleasures, are made to submit to the caprices of that life outside of their own; their only fear for the future is lest they lose it.

At that moment, therefore, Pépita's children separated her from her true life as widely as Balthazar Claes was separated from his by science; and so, when she had returned from vespers and thrown herself into her easy-chair, she sent the children away, bidding them be perfectly quiet; then she sent a request to her husband that he would come to see her. But, although Lemulquinier, the old valet, had done his best to tear him away from his laboratory, Balthazar had remained there. Thus Madame Claes had time to reflect; and she, too, remained lost in thought, regardless of the day, the hour, the weather. The thought of owing thirty thousand francs and being unable to pay it awoke past sorrows, and added them to the sorrows of the present and future. That burden of ideas, of sensations, of interests, was too heavy for her; she wept.

When Balthazar entered the room, his face seemed to her more terrible, more absorbed, more vacant, than she had ever seen it; when he failed to reply, she was at first fascinated, as it were, by the immobility of that colorless, empty stare, by all the consuming ideas distilling within that bald head. Under the influence of that feeling, she longed to die. When she heard his heedless voice expressing a scientific aspiration at the moment when despair was crushing her heart, her courage returned; she resolved to fight against that formidable power which had deprived her of a lover, which had stolen a father from her children, a fortune from the family, happiness from them all. Nevertheless, she could not conquer

the constant trepidation that agitated her, for, in all her life, no such momentous scene had ever taken place. Was not that awful moment big with her future, and was not her whole past summed up therein?

Now, feeble, timid persons, or those in whom the intensity of their sensations magnifies the difficulties of life, the men who are seized with involuntary trembling before the arbiters of their fate, all can imagine the myriads of thoughts which whirled about in that woman's brain, and the feelings which oppressed her heart with their weight when her husband walked slowly toward the garden door. Most women are familiar with the anguish of the secret deliberation against which Madame Claes struggled. So that even those hearts which have been violently agitated simply because of the necessity of making known to their husbands some slight excess of expenditure or of indebtedness at the milliner's, will understand how much more madly the heart must beat when one's whole life is at stake. A lovely woman has a graceful way of throwing herself at her husband's feet, she finds resources in grief-stricken attitudes; whereas the consciousness of her physical infirmities added to Madame Claes's dread. Thus, when she saw that Balthazar was on the point of leaving the room, her first impulse was to rush to him; but a painful reflection repressed her impulse, she was actually on the point of standing in his presence! Must she not inevitably appear a ridiculous object to a man, who, being no longer

under the spell of love, could see clearly? Joséphine would gladly have lost everything, fortune and children, rather than lessen her power as a wife. She determined to avoid all unfavorable chances at so solemn a moment, and called in a loud voice :

“ Balthazar ! ”

He turned instinctively, and coughed; but, without paying any heed to his wife, he expectorated in one of the little square boxes placed at intervals along the wall, as in all rooms in Holland and Belgium. Although that man never thought of anybody, he never forgot the spittoons, so inveterate was the habit. To poor Joséphine, who was incapable of understanding that peculiar freak, her husband's constant care of the furniture was always a source of incredible suffering; and at that moment it was so intense that it drove her beyond all bounds, and made her exclaim in an impatient tone, in which all her wounded feelings found expression:

“ Why, monsieur, I am speaking to you ! ”

“ What does this mean ? ” retorted Balthazar, turning quickly and darting at his wife a glance in which life was once more apparent, and which was like a stroke of lightning to her.

“ Forgive me, my dear, ” she said, turning pale.

She tried to rise and hold out her hand, but she fell back helplessly.

“ I am dying ! ” she exclaimed in a voice broken by sobs.

At that sight, Balthazar, like all absent-minded

people, had a sharp reaction, and divined, so to speak, the secret of that attack; he at once took Madame Claes in his arms, opened the door leading into the small anteroom, and ascended the old wooden staircase so swiftly that his wife's dress, having caught on the jaw of one of the monsters which formed the balusters, a whole breadth was torn out with a great noise, and remained behind. He opened the door of the vestibule common to their apartments with a kick; but he found his wife's room locked.

He placed Joséphine gently in a chair.

"Great Heaven! where's the key?" he exclaimed.

"Thanks, dear!" said Madame Claes, opening her eyes; "this is the first time in a long while that I have been so near your heart."

"Good God!" cried Claes, "the key? here come the servants—"

Joséphine pointed to the key, which hung from her pocket at the end of a long ribbon. After opening the door, Balthazar dropped his wife on a couch, went out to prevent the frightened servants from coming up, ordering them to serve dinner at once, and returned eagerly to his wife.

"What is the matter, my dear life?" he said, sitting down beside her and taking her hand, which he kissed.

"Why, nothing is the matter now," she said, "I am not ill any longer! But I would like to have God's power so that I might lay at your feet all the gold in the world!"

“Why gold?” he asked.

And he drew his wife to him, embraced her, and kissed her again on the forehead.

“Do you not give me greater riches by loving me as you do, my dear and precious love?” he continued.

“Oh! my Balthazar, why will you not drive away the misery of all our lives, as you banish with your voice the grief of my heart? At last, I see that you are still the same.”

“What misery do you refer to, my dear?”

“Why, we are ruined!”

“Ruined?” he repeated.

He smiled, patted his wife’s hand which he held in his, and said in a gentle voice which she had not heard for a long, long time:

“But, my angel, to-morrow it may be that our fortune will be without bounds. Yesterday, while in search of much more important secrets, I believe that I discovered a means of crystallizing carbon, which is the substance of the diamond. O my dearest wife, in a few days you will forgive my abstraction!—It seems that I am abstracted at times.—Did I not speak sharply to you just now? Be indulgent to a man who has never ceased to think of you, whose labors are all filled with you, with us—”

“Enough, enough!” said she, “we will talk about all this to-night, my dear. My illness was caused by too great sorrow; now I am suffering from too great pleasure.”

She had never expected to see that face lighted up again by a sentiment as tender as in the old days, to hear that voice as gentle as it used to be, and to find all that she thought that she had lost.

“Very well, we will talk to-night,” he replied. “If I am absorbed in meditation, remind me of this promise. To-night I mean to lay aside my calculations, my labors, and plunge into all the joys of home, all the pleasures of the heart; for I need them, Pépita, I am thirsty for them!”

“Will you tell me what you are trying to find, Balthazar?”

“Why, my poor child, you would not understand.”

“Do you think so?—My dear, I have been studying chemistry for four months, so that I might be able to talk with you about it. I have read Fourcroy, Lavoisier, Chaptal, Nollet, Rouelle, Berthollet, Gay-Lussac, Spallanzani, Leuwenhoek, Galvani, Volta, in a word, all the books relating to the science to which you are so devoted. You can tell me your secrets, you see.”

“Oh! you are an angel,” cried Balthazar, falling at his wife’s feet, and shedding tears of emotion which made her quiver, “we shall understand each other in everything!”

“Oh!” said she, “I would throw myself into the fire of the hell that heats your furnaces to hear that word from your mouth, and to see you like this.”

Hearing her daughter’s step in the hall, she ran hastily to the door.

“What do you want, Marguerite?” she asked.

“Monsieur Pierquin has come, dear mamma. If he stays to dinner, we shall need some linen, and you forgot to give it to me this morning.”

Madame Claes took from her pocket a bunch of little keys, handed them to her daughter, pointing to the sandal-wood cupboard which lined the walls of the anteroom, and said to her:

“Take them from the cupboard on the right, my child, from the Graindorge service.—As my dear Balthazar has come back to me to-day, give him to me just as he was,” she said, returning, with a sweet, mischievous expression on her face. “Go to your room, my love, and dress, to please me; we have Pierquin to dinner. Come, take off these torn clothes. Just look at those spots! Isn’t it muriatic or sulphuric acid that makes the yellow circle around all these holes? Come, make yourself young again; I’ll send Mulquinier to you when I have changed my dress.”

Balthazar attempted to go to his own room through the door connecting it with his wife’s; but he had forgotten that it was locked on his side. He went out through the anteroom.

“Put the linen on a chair, Marguerite, and come and dress me,” said Madame Claes to her daughter; “I don’t want Martha.”

Balthazar had taken Marguerite by the shoulders, and turned her toward him with a gesture of delight, saying to her:

“Good-afternoon, my child! you are very pretty

to-day in your muslin dress and with that pink belt!"

Then he kissed her on the forehead and pressed her hand.

"Mamma, papa just kissed me!" said Marguerite, entering her mother's room; "he seems very cheerful, very happy!"

"Your father is a very great man, my child; for nearly three years now he has been working for the glory and fortune of his family, and he thinks that he has reached the goal of his investigations. This day ought to be a very happy holiday to us all."

"Dear mamma," replied Marguerite, "our servants have been so unhappy to see him always cross and scowling that we shall not be alone in our joy. Oh! do put on another belt, this one is too faded."

"Very well, but let us make haste, for I want to speak with Pierquin. Where is he?"

"In the parlor, amusing himself with Jean."

"Where are Gabriel and Félicie?"

"I hear them in the garden."

"Then run down at once and see to it that they don't pick any tulips; your father hasn't seen this year's display yet, and he might like to look at them when we leave the table. Tell Mulquinier to take your father everything that he needs for his toilet."

When Marguerite had gone, Madame Claes glanced at the children through her window which looked on the garden, and saw them intently watching one of the shiny, gold-spangled, green-winged insects vulgarly called "darning-needles."

"Be good, my darlings," she said, opening a part of the window, which ran in a groove, and which she fastened back to air the room.

Then she knocked softly at her husband's door to make sure that he had not relapsed into his abstraction. He opened the door, and she said in a joyful tone when she saw that he was undressed:

"You won't leave me long alone with Pierquin, will you? You will join us soon."

She ran downstairs so lightly that a stranger hearing her would not have recognized the step of a lame woman.

"When monsieur carried madame upstairs," said the valet, whom she met on the stairway, "he tore her dress; it is only a paltry bit of cloth, but it broke the jaw of that figure and I don't know who can mend it. So there's our staircase spoiled, that baluster was so fine!"

"Pshaw! my good Mulquinier, do not have it mended, no harm has been done."

"What the deuce has happened," said Mulquinier to himself, "that's no harm? Can it be that my master has found the *Absolute*?"

"Good-afternoon, Monsieur Pierquin," said Madame Claes, as she opened the parlor door.

The notary ran to offer his cousin his arm, but she never would take any but her husband's; so she thanked him with a smile, and said:

"I suppose you have come about the thirty thousand francs?"

"Yes, madame; when I returned home, I found a

IN THE RUE DE PARIS

* * * *he at once took Madame Claes in his arms, opened the door leading into the small anteroom, and ascended the old wooden staircase so swiftly that his wife's dress, having caught on the jaw of one of the monsters which formed the balusters, a whole breadth was torn out with a great noise, and remained behind.*





ADRIEN-MOREAU.

letter of advice from Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville to the effect that they have drawn on Monsieur Claes in six bills for five thousand francs each."

"Well, don't mention the subject to Balthazar to-day," she said. "Dine with us. If he should happen to ask you why you came, invent some plausible pretext, I beg. Give me the letter, I will speak to him about it myself. All goes well," she continued, observing the notary's amazement. "In a few months my husband will probably repay the sums he has borrowed."

As he listened to those words, spoken in an undertone, the notary had his eyes upon Mademoiselle Claes, who was returning from the garden followed by Gabriel and Félicie.

"I have never seen Mademoiselle Marguerite so pretty as she is at this moment," he said.

Madame Claes, who had seated herself in her easy-chair and had taken little Jean on her knees, looked at her daughter and the notary with an affection of indifference.

Pierquin was of medium height, neither stout nor thin, with a face of a commonplace type of beauty which commonly wore a depressed look, rather disappointed than melancholy, a musing expression, rather hesitating than pensive; he was supposed to be a misanthrope, but he was too selfish, too great an eater, for his divorce from society to be real. His glance, usually lost in space, his indifferent manner, his ostentatious taciturnity, seemed to denote profundity of thought, but in reality were a cloak for

the emptiness and nullity of a notary occupied exclusively with human affairs, but still young enough to be envious. An alliance with the Claes family would have been in his eyes a reason for devotion without bounds, if he had not had an underlying stratum of avarice. He played at generosity, but he knew how to reckon. And so, without attempting to explain to himself the change in his manners, he was incisive, stern, morose,—as is commonly the case with business men,—when Claes seemed to him to be ruined; then became affectionate, obsequious, almost servile, when he suspected that his cousin's labors might result happily. At one time, he looked upon Marguerite Claes as a princess, to whom it was impossible for a provincial notary to raise his eyes; again, he saw in her only a poor girl who would be only too fortunate if he should deign to make her his wife. He was a provincial and a Fleming, without malice; he lacked neither devotion nor kindness of heart; but he had an artless egotism which made his good qualities incomplete, and absurd mannerisms which detracted from his personal attractiveness.

At that moment, Madame Claes remembered how sharply the notary had spoken to her under the porch of Saint-Pierre, and observed the great overturn which her reply had caused in his manners; she divined the course of his thoughts, and with a far-seeing glance she tried to read her daughter's mind to ascertain if she were thinking of her cousin; but she detected no indication of anything but the most absolute indifference.

After they had conversed a few moments concerning the gossip of the town, the master of the house came down from his apartment, where his wife had heard with indescribable pleasure the creaking of boots on the floor. His step, like that of a young and active man, announced a complete metamorphosis, and Madame Claes's suspense was so agonizing that she could with difficulty restrain a spasmodic movement when he descended the stairs. Balthazar soon made his appearance, dressed according to the prevailing fashion. He wore top-boots well polished, which showed the top of a white silk stocking, blue cashmere breeches with gilt buttons, a white flowered waistcoat, and a blue frock-coat. He had shaved, combed, and perfumed his hair, trimmed his nails, and washed his hands with such care that he would hardly have been recognized by those who had seen him of late. Instead of an old man almost in his dotage, his wife, his children, and the notary saw a man of forty years, whose affable, courteous face and expression were most attractive and charming. Even the fatigue and anxiety betrayed by the sharpness of the face and the clinging of the skin to the bones had a sort of fascination.

“ Good-afternoon, Pierquin, ” said Balthazar Claes.

Once more a father and husband, the chemist took his last child from his wife's lap and lifted him high in the air, tossing him rapidly up and down.

“ See this little fellow! ” he said to the notary.

“ Doesn't such a pretty creature make you long to

marry? Believe me, my dear fellow, family joys afford consolation for everything.—*B-r-r-r!*” he exclaimed, throwing Jean in the air; “*pound!*” as he brought him down to the floor. “*B-r-r-r! pound!*”

The child shrieked with laughter when he found himself at one moment against the ceiling and the next moment on the floor. The mother turned her head away in order not to betray the emotion caused by a game, so simple in appearance, which meant to her a complete domestic revolution.

“Let’s see how you walk,” said Balthazar, putting the child on the floor and throwing himself into an easy-chair.

The boy ran to his father, attracted by the glitter of the gilt buttons on his breeches, above the boot-tops.

“You’re a darling!” said the father, kissing him; “you’re a true Claes, you walk straight.—Well, Gabriel, how’s Père Morillon,” he asked his oldest son, taking him by the ear and pulling it; “do you defend yourself gallantly against themes and translations? do you bite sharp at mathematics?”

Then Balthazar rose, went to Pierquin, and said, with the affectionate courtesy characteristic of him:

“My dear fellow, have you anything to ask me?”

He took his arm and led him into the garden, adding:

“Come and see my tulips.”

Madame Claes watched her husband as he left the room, and was unable to restrain her joy at seeing him so youthful, so agreeable, so thoroughly like

himself; she rose, put her arm around her daughter's waist and kissed her.

"My dear Marguerite, my darling child, I love you even more than usual to-day," she said.

"It's a long time since I have seen papa in such good humor," was the reply.

Lemulquinier announced that dinner was served. To avoid taking Pierquin's arm, Madame Claes took Balthazar's, and the whole family adjourned to the dining-room.

That room, the ceiling of which consisted of rafters in plain sight, but embellished by paintings, and scoured and freshened every year, was furnished with high oak sideboards on which were displayed the most curious pieces of the family plate. The walls were hung with purple leather whereon hunting subjects were printed in gold. Above the sideboards here and there were feathers of strange birds and rare shells, carefully arranged. The chairs had not been changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century; they were of the square pattern with twisted legs, and small backs, upholstered in fringed stuffs, which was in such general use that Raphael illustrated it in his picture called the *Madonna of the Chair*. The wood had turned black, but the gilt nails shone as if they were new, and the coverings, carefully renovated, were of a beautiful shade of red. That room was a perfect reproduction of Flanders with its Spanish innovations. The carafes and flagons on the table had the air of respectability imparted by their graceful rounded outlines of antique

pattern. The glasses were the genuine old long-stemmed glasses that we see in all the pictures of the Dutch or Flemish school. The dinner service, decorated with colored figures after the style of Bernard Palissy, was from the English manufactory of Wedgwood. The silverware was massive, with square faces and repoussé-work, genuine old family plate, the different pieces of which, all varying in carving, style, and shape, marked the beginning of the prosperity and the progress of the fortune of the family of Claes. The napkins had fringe, a wholly Spanish fashion. As for the linen, the reader will readily understand that it was a point of honor with the Claes to possess a supply magnificent in quality and quantity. The tableware and plate we have described were intended for the daily use of the family. The house in front, where parties were held, had its own especial treasures, whose marvels, held in reserve for gala occasions, were surrounded by that solemn veneration which vanishes when things are degraded, so to speak, by daily use. In the house in the rear, everything bore the stamp of patriarchal simplicity. And, lastly,—a charming detail,—a vine ran along outside the windows, which were everywhere surrounded by its foliage.

“You remain true to tradition, madame,” said Pierquin, as he received a plate of that wild thyme soup in which Flemish and Dutch cooks place little balls of meat mingled with pieces of fried bread, “this is the soup our fathers used to eat on Sunday! Your house and my uncle Des Raquets’ are the only ones where

this soup, historic in the Low Countries, is ever seen in these days.—Ah! I beg your pardon, old Monsieur Savaron de Savarus still proudly serves it in his house at Tournai; but everywhere else old Flanders is vanishing. Furniture is made in the Greek style now; we see nothing but helmets, bucklers, lances, and fasces. Everybody rebuilds his house, sells his old furniture, melts down his silverware, or exchanges it for Sèvres porcelain, which cannot compare with old Saxony or Chinese ware. For my part, I am Flemish to the core. So that my heart bleeds when I see coppersmiths buying our fine furniture, incrusting with copper or brass, for the bare value of the wood or metal. But society proposes to change its skin, I verily believe. Everything, even the processes of art, is being lost! When everything must be done in a hurry, nothing can be done conscientiously. During my last trip to Paris, I was taken to see the pictures exhibited at the Louvre. On my word, they're no better than fire-screens, those pictures without life or depth, in which the painters seem afraid to put any color. And they propose, they say, to overturn our old school!—Ah! bah!”

“Our old painters,” rejoined Balthazar, “studied the different combinations and the resistance of colors by subjecting them to the action of the sun and rain. But you are right; to-day, the material resources of art are less cultivated than ever.”

Madame Claes was not listening to the conversation. When she heard the notary say that porcelain

services were in fashion, she at once conceived the happy idea of selling the massive silverware she had inherited from her brother, hoping in that way to be able to pay the thirty thousand francs owed by her husband.

“By the way,” said Balthazar to the notary, when Madame Claes gave her attention anew to the conversation, “are people talking about my work here in Douai?”

“Yes,” replied Pierquin, “everybody wonders what you are spending so much money upon. Yesterday I heard the first president deploring that a man of your talent should be trying to find the philosopher’s stone. I took the liberty to reply that you were too well educated a man not to know that that would be contending with the impossible, too good a Christian to think that you could prevail over God, and, like every other Claes, too close a calculator to exchange your money for charlatan’s powder. Nevertheless, I will admit that I have shared the regret caused by your withdrawal from society. Really you no longer seem to belong to the town. Believe me, madame, you would have been delighted if you could have heard the words of praise which everybody took pleasure in saying of you and Monsieur Claes.”

“You have acted the part of a loyal kinsman in repelling imputations, the least harmful result of which would be to make me ridiculous,” replied Balthazar. “Ah! the people of Douai believe that I am ruined! In two months, my dear Pierquin, I

will celebrate the anniversary of my wedding by a fête which will win back for me the esteem that our dear compatriots accord to gold pieces.”

Madame Claes blushed crimson. That anniversary had been overlooked for two years. Like those madmen who have moments during which their faculties gleam with unaccustomed brilliancy, Balthazar had never been so bright and sparkling in his affectionate tenderness. He lavished attentions upon his children, and his conversation was fascinating in grace and wit and aptness. That return of the paternal instinct, so long absent, was certainly the most delightful boon he could confer on his wife, and his words and glances had resumed that constantly sympathetic expression which is felt from heart to heart, and which demonstrates a charming identity of sentiment.

Old Lemulquinier seemed to grow younger, he went in and out with unaccustomed activity caused by the fulfilment of his secret hopes. The change that had suddenly taken place in his master's manner was fraught with even deeper meaning to him than to Madame Claes. Where the family saw a return of happiness, the valet saw a fortune. By dint of assisting Balthazar in his experiments, he had espoused his mania. Whether he had grasped the scope of the chemist's investigations from the remarks that escaped him when his goal receded before him, or whether the innate tendency of man to imitation had led him to adopt the ideas of the man in whose atmosphere he lived, certain it is that

Lemulquinier had conceived for his master a superstitious feeling compounded of awe, admiration, and selfishness. The laboratory was to him what the lottery office is to the common people, hope in a definite shape. Every night he said to himself as he went to bed: "Perhaps we shall be swimming in gold to-morrow!" And he awoke on the morrow with a faith as intense as on the night before.

His name denoted a purely Flemish origin. Formerly the common people were known only by a sobriquet taken from their trade, their province, their physical conformation, or their moral qualities. That sobriquet became the name of the burgher family when they were enfranchised. In Flanders flax merchants are called *mulquiniers*, and such undoubtedly was the trade of that one of the old valet's ancestors who passed from the condition of serf to that of burgher, long before some misfortune unknown to history reduced the *mulquinier's* descendant to the primitive condition of serf, plus the wages. The history of Flanders, of its flax and its commerce, was summed up, therefore, in that old servant, often called, for euphony's sake, Mulquinier. Neither his character nor his face lacked originality. The latter, triangular in shape, was broad at the base, long, and seamed by the small-pox, which had given it a fantastic appearance, leaving behind a multitude of shiny white lines. He was tall and thin, and his gait was solemn and mysterious. His little yellowish eyes, of the same shade as the smooth yellow wig he wore on his head, cast none but oblique glances.

His exterior, therefore, was in harmony with the sentiment of curiosity he aroused. His functions as assistant admitted to his master's secrets, concerning which he maintained absolute silence, invested him with a certain charm. The dwellers on Rue de Paris watched him pass with interest not unmixed with fear, for his responses were sibylline and always big with possible treasure. Proud of being necessary to his master, he exercised a sort of quarrelsome authority over his fellow-servants, and availed himself of it to obtain from them concessions which made him half master of the house. Unlike most Flemish servants, who are warmly attached to the whole family, he had no affection for anybody but Balthazar. If anything grieved Madame Claes, or if any propitious event occurred in the family, he ate his bread and butter and drank his beer with his usual phlegm.

The dinner at an end, Madame Claes suggested that they should take their coffee in the garden, by the cluster of tulips which grew in the centre. The flower-pots containing the tulips, with the name of each variety carved on a piece of slate, had been buried, and so arranged as to form a pyramid at the apex of which was a *gueule-de-dragon* tulip of which Balthazar owned the only specimens. It was called *Tulipa Claesiana*, it contained the seven colors, and the long indentations of the petals seemed to be gilded on the edges. Balthazar's father, who had refused ten thousand florins for it several times, took such abundant precautions that not a single

seed should be stolen that he kept it in his parlor, and often passed whole days gazing at it. The stalk was very large, straight and firm, and of a beautiful green; the proportions of the plant were in harmony with the calyx, the colors of which were marked by that brilliancy and distinctness which formerly gave such fabulous value to those gorgeous flowers.

"There are thirty or forty thousand francs' worth of tulips," said the notary, glancing alternately at his young cousin and the cluster of many colors.

Madame Claes was too enthusiastic over the beauty of the flowers, which resembled superb jewels in the rays of the setting sun, to grasp clearly the significance of the notarial remark.

"What are they good for?" continued the notary, addressing Balthazar; "you ought to sell them."

"Nonsense! am I in any need of money?" replied Claes, with the gesture of a man to whom forty thousand francs seemed a very small matter.

There was a moment's pause during which the children made divers exclamations:

"O mamma, look at that one!"

"Oh! there's a lovely one!"

"What's this one's name?"

"What a slough for the human reason!" cried Balthazar, raising his clasped hands with a gesture of despair. "A combination of oxygen and hydrogen in different proportions produces in the same surroundings, and by the action of the same principle, all these colors, each of which represents a different result."

His wife understood the elements of the proposition, which was put forth too rapidly for her to grasp it in its entirety; Balthazar remembered that she had studied his favorite science, and said to her, with a mysterious sign:

“Even if you understood, you could not know yet what I mean!”

And thereupon he seemed to sink into one of those fits of meditation which were usual with him.

“I should say not,” said Pierquin, taking a cup of coffee from Marguerite’s hands.—“Drive nature away, and it returns at a gallop!” he added in an undertone to Madame Claes. “Even if you are good enough to speak to him yourself, the devil could not lure him from his contemplation. He is in for it until to-morrow.”

He said good-night to Claes, who pretended not to hear him, kissed little Jean whom his mother held in her arms, and, with a profound bow, took his leave. When the door closed behind him, Balthazar put his arm around his wife’s waist, and put an end to the anxiety his pretended reverie might have caused her by whispering in her ear:

“I knew what to do to send him away!”

Madame Claes turned her face to her husband, in no wise ashamed to let him see the tears that came to her eyes: they were so sweet! then she laid her head on Balthazar’s shoulder and let Jean slip to the ground.

“Let us go back to the parlor,” she said, after a pause.

*

Throughout the evening, Balthazar was in an almost insanely merry humor; he invented a thousand games for his children, and entered into them so heartily himself that he did not notice that his wife left the room two or three times. About half-past nine, when Jean had gone to bed, and Marguerite returned to the parlor after helping Félicie to undress, she found her mother sitting in the great easy-chair, and her father holding her hand and talking with her. She was afraid that she might disturb them, and was about to leave the room without speaking; Madame Claes noticed it and called her:

“Come here, Marguerite, come, my dear child.”

She drew her to her side and kissed her lovingly on the forehead, saying:

“Take your book to your room and go to bed early.”

“Good-night, my darling daughter,” said Balthazar.

Marguerite kissed her father and left the room. Claes and his wife were left alone, and sat for a few moments watching the last gleams of twilight dying away among the leaves in the garden, where it was already dark, so that their delicate tracery could hardly be distinguished. When night had almost fallen, Balthazar said to his wife in a voice trembling with emotion:

“Let us go upstairs.”

Long before English customs had consecrated a woman's bedroom as a holy place, the bedroom of a Flemish woman was impenetrable. The excellent housewives of that country made no parade of their virtue, but with them it was a habit contracted in childhood, a domestic superstition, which made a bedroom a charming sanctuary where one breathed tender sentiments, where simplicity blended with all that is sweetest and most worthy of respect in social life. In the peculiar position which Madame Claes occupied, any woman would have striven to collect about her the daintiest objects; but she had done it with exquisite taste, knowing what influence the aspect of our surroundings exerts upon the feelings. In a pretty creature, it would have been luxuriousness; in her case, it was a necessity. She realized the full meaning of the words: “A woman makes herself pretty!” a maxim which guided all the acts of Napoléon's first wife, and made her sometimes false, whereas Madame Claes was always natural and true.

Although Balthazar was perfectly familiar with his wife's bedroom, he had become so completely oblivious to the material things of life, that when he entered the room he was conscious of a pleasant thrill, as if he then saw it for the first time. The ostentatious gayety of a victorious woman burst forth in the gorgeous colors of the tulips which protruded from the long necks of corpulent Chinese vases skilfully arranged, and in the profusion of

lights whose effect could be compared only to that of bursts of joyous music. The light of the candles imparted a harmonious brilliancy to the gray linen coverings, the monotony of which was relieved by the reflection of the gold decoration sparingly distributed over a few ornaments, and by the varied tints of the flowers which resembled sheaves of precious stones. The secret of those preparations was he, always he!—Joséphine could not have told Balthazar in more eloquent words that he was always the active principle of her joys and her sorrows. The sight of that room induced a delicious frame of mind, and banished all melancholy fancies, to leave only the feeling of pure, unruffled happiness. The material of the hangings, bought in China, exhaled that delicious fragrance which penetrates the body without wearying it. And the curtains, carefully drawn, betrayed a desire for solitude, a jealous purpose to keep to herself the slightest sound of the voice, and to confine within those walls the glances of her reconquered husband. With her beautiful black hair, perfectly smooth, falling on each side of her face like the wings of a raven, Madame Claes, enveloped in a *peignoir* which extended to the neck and over which was a long pelerine flounced with lace, drew the tapestry portière, which excluded all sounds from without.

From the doorway, Joséphine bestowed upon her husband, who had seated himself by the fireplace, one of those bright smiles by which a clever woman, whose heart sometimes lends animation to her face,

can express irresistible hopes. A woman's greatest charm consists in a constant appeal to man's generosity, in a graceful declaration of weakness whereby she inflates his pride and awakens the noblest sentiments in his breast. Does not a confession of weakness carry with it magical seduction?

When the rings of the portière had slipped almost noiselessly along their wooden pole, she turned to her husband, and seemed to try to disguise her bodily infirmities at that moment by resting her hand on a chair in order to walk gracefully. It was like an appeal for help. Balthazar, who had lost himself a moment in contemplation of that dark face which stood out against the gray background, attracting and satisfying the eye, rose, took his wife in his arms, and carried her to the couch. That was what she wanted.

"You promised," she said, taking his hand and holding it in her own electrifying ones, "to admit me to the secret of your investigations. You must agree, my dear, that I am worthy to know it, since I have had the courage to study a science condemned by the Church, in order to qualify myself to understand you; but I am inquisitive, do not conceal anything from me. Come, tell me how it happened that you rose one morning thoughtful and careworn when I had left you so happy the night before?"

"Was it to hear me talk chemistry that you arrayed yourself so coquettishly?"

"My dear, is it not the very greatest of pleasures for me to receive a confidence from you which will

strengthen my hold upon your heart? does not a mutual understanding between hearts comprise and engender all the joys of life? Your love comes back to me pure and unshared; I wish to know what train of ideas has been powerful enough to deprive me of it so long. Yes, I am more jealous of a thought than of all women put together. Love is vast, but it is not infinite; while science has immeasurable depths into which I cannot bear to see you go all alone. I detest everything that can force itself between us. If you should obtain the renown you seek, it would make me unhappy: for it would cause you keen enjoyment, would it not? And I alone, monsieur, should be the source of all your pleasures."

"It was not an idea, my angel, but a man, who turned my steps into this glorious path."

"A man!" she cried in dismay.

"Do you remember the Polish officer, Pépita, who stayed with us in 1809?"

"Do I remember him!" she exclaimed. "I have often lost patience with myself because my memory so often brings before me those two eyes of his, like tongues of flames, the great hollows over his eyes in which you could see burning coals as from hell, his enormous bald head, his twisted moustaches, his angular, wasted face!—And what horrible tranquillity in his bearing and gait!—If there had been room in any of the inns, he certainly would not have slept here."

"That Polish gentleman's name was Monsieur Adam de Wierzchownia," said Balthazar. "When

you had left us alone in the parlor that night, we began to talk, and by chance got upon the subject of chemistry. Compelled by poverty to abandon the study of that science, he had joined the army. I believe that we were having a glass of sugared water together when we recognized one another as adepts. When I told Mulquinier to bring the sugar in lumps, the captain made a gesture of surprise.

“‘Have you studied chemistry?’ he asked.

“‘With Lavoisier,’ I replied.

“‘You are very fortunate to be free and rich!’ he cried.

“And there issued from his breast one of those sighs which reveal a hell of grief hidden in a brain or confined in a heart—ardent, concentrated emotion which words cannot describe. He completed his thought with a glance that froze my blood. After a pause, he said to me that, Poland being practically dead, he had taken refuge in Sweden. He had sought consolation there in the study of chemistry, for which he had always felt an irresistible vocation.

“‘I see,’ he added, ‘that you, like myself, have discovered that gum-arabic, sugar, and starch, when pulverized, produce absolutely similar substances, which show, upon analysis, the same *qualitative* result.’

“He paused again, and, after scrutinizing me closely, he talked with me in an undertone, confidentially and in solemn words, of which the general bearing only has remained in my memory; but he spoke with a power and earnestness of intonation,

with an eloquence of gesture, which moved my very entrails and belabored my understanding as the hammer strikes the iron on an anvil. This is a summary of the arguments which were to me the burning coals that God placed upon Isaiah's tongue, for my studies with Lavoisier enabled me to understand their full scope:

“‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘the similarity of those three substances, apparently so distinct, led me to reflect that all the products of nature probably had one and the same active principle. The investigations of modern chemistry have demonstrated the truth of the law as to the great majority of natural effects. Chemistry divides creation into two distinct portions: organic and inorganic nature. Organic nature, including all creations, vegetable or animal, which display an organization, more or less perfect, or, to be more exact, a greater or less power of motion which governs their sentient power,—organic nature, I say, is certainly the most important part of our world. Now, analysis has reduced all the products of organic nature to four elementary substances: three gases, nitrogen, hydrogen, and oxygen; and another non-metallic solid substance, carbon. Inorganic nature, on the contrary, which varies so little, which is without motion or feeling, and to which we can safely deny the power of growth which Linnæus unthinkingly attributed to it, includes fifty-three elementary substances, whose different combinations form all its products. Is it probable that the elements are more numerous where

fewer results are produced? My former master's opinion, therefore, was that those fifty-three substances have a common basic principle, originally modified by the action of a power which has ceased to exist to-day, but which human genius should be able to re-establish. Suppose that power is stirred to activity once more, we shall have a Unitary chemistry. Organic and inorganic nature would then seem to be based upon four elements, and, if we could succeed in decomposing nitrogen, which we must consider a negation, we should have only three. Which brings us at once to the great Ternary of the ancients and of the alchemists of the Middle Ages, which we do wrong to ridicule. Modern chemistry is as yet only that. It is much and it is little. It is much, for chemistry is accustomed to recoil at no obstacle; it is little compared with what still remains to be done. Chance has done that noble science good service! For instance, did not that crystallized tear of pure carbon, the diamond, seem to be the last substance that it was possible to create? The ancient alchemists, who believed that gold could be decomposed and consequently that it could be made, recoiled at the idea of producing the diamond; and yet we have discovered its nature and the law governing its composition. I,' he added, 'have gone even further! An experiment proved to me that the mysterious Ternary, which has occupied men's minds from time immemorial, will not be found in analyses conducted according to present methods, which lack direction toward a fixed point.

Here is the experiment.—Plant the seeds of some organic substance, water-cress, for instance, in some inorganic substance, say sulphur. Water the seeds with distilled water, in order that no substance of which we know nothing may find its way into the product of the germination. The seeds sprout and grow in a soil of which we know the composition, feeding only upon substances known to us by analysis. Cut the stalks of the plants several times, in order to procure a sufficiently large quantity to produce several drachms of ashes when burned, so that you will have an appreciable bulk to operate upon: well, upon analyzing the ashes, you will find silicic acid, aluminum, calcium, phosphate, and carbonate, magnesium carbonate, sulphate and carbonate of potash and oxide of iron, just as if the water-cress had grown in the earth, on the edge of the water. Now, these substances do not exist in the sulphur, an elementary substance, which served as soil for the plant, nor in the water used to water it, the composition of which is perfectly well known; but, as they do not exist in the seeds either, we cannot explain their presence in the plant except by supposing an element common to the substances contained in the water-cress and to those in which it has grown. Thus the air, distilled water, sulphur, and the substances exhibited by the analysis of the water-cress, namely, potassium, limestone, magnesium, aluminum, etc., must have a common element wandering about in the atmosphere as produced by the sun. From that infallible experiment,' he cried,

‘I deduced the existence of the *Absolute!* A substance common to all created things, modified by a single force, such is a precise and clear statement of the problem presented by the Absolute, a problem which seemed to me *capable of solution*. There you will find the mysterious Ternary, before which mankind has knelt in all ages: original matter, the cause, the result. You will find that terrible number Three in everything human, it dominates religions, sciences, laws. At that point,’ he added, ‘war and poverty arrested my labors.—You are a pupil of Lavoisier, you are rich and master of your time, so that I can properly confide to you my conjectures. This is the result to which my own private experiments have caused me to look forward. THE ONE SUBSTANCE must be an element common to the three gases and carbon. The MEDIUM must be the element common to positive electricity and negative electricity. Proceed to the discovery of the proofs which will establish these two truths, and you will possess the supreme secret of all the results produced by nature. O monsieur,’ he said, striking his forehead, ‘when one carries *here* the last word of creation, feeling a conviction of the existence of the *Absolute*, can one call it living to be carried hither and thither in the rush of this multitude of men, who push and jostle one another without knowing what they are doing? My present life is the exact opposite of a dream. My body goes and comes, acts, finds itself in the midst of guns and troops and fire, travels from one end of Europe to the other at the dictates of a power

which I obey while I despise it. My mind is unconscious of my acts, it remains absorbed by one fixed idea, benumbed by that idea, the Search for the Absolute, for that principle, by means of which seeds absolutely the same, placed in the same soil, produce in one case white flowers, in another case yellow flowers! The same phenomenon is true of silk-worms, which, fed on the same leaves and constituted apparently in the same way, produce white silk and yellow silk; and of man himself, who often has legitimate children entirely unlike their mother and himself. Moreover, does not the logical deduction from these facts imply an explanation of all the effects of nature? Tell me, what is more consistent with our views concerning God than to believe that He did everything in the simplest way? The Pythagorean adoration of the ONE, from which all numbers come, and which represents the one original substance; the adoration of the number TWO, the first aggregation of units and the type of all others; that of the number THREE, which in all times has stood for God, that is to say, matter, force, and product,—represented traditionally the sum total of the ill-defined knowledge of the Absolute! Stahl, Becher, Paracelsus, Agrippa, all the great seekers for hidden causes had for their password *Trismegistus*, which means the great Ternary. Ignorant men, accustomed to frown upon alchemy, that transcendent chemistry, are doubtless unaware that we are devoting ourselves to justifying the ardent investigations of those great men! When I had found

the Absolute, I intended to lay hold of the principle of Motion. Ah! while I am feeding on powder and ordering men to death to no purpose, my old master is heaping discovery on discovery, he is flying toward the Absolute! And I shall die like a dog in the corner of some battery!

“When that unfortunate great man had become somewhat calmer, he said to me, with a touching sort of fraternity:

“‘If I should think of any new experiment to be made, I will bequeath it to you when I die.’

“My Pépita,” said Balthazar, pressing his wife’s hand, “tears of passionate excitement rolled down that man’s hollow cheeks while he kindled in my mind the flame of that reasoning which Lavoisier had already timidly suggested, without daring to give way to it—”

“What!” cried Madame Claes, unable to restrain her impulse to interrupt her husband, “that man, passing a single night under our roof, took your affection from us, destroyed the happiness of a whole family by a single sentence, a single phrase? O my dear Balthazar, did that man make the sign of the Cross? did you examine him closely? No one but the Tempter can have that yellow eye from which flashed the fire of Prometheus. Yes, the devil alone could tear you away from me. Since that day, you have been neither father nor husband, nor head of the family—”

“What,” exclaimed Balthazar, springing to his feet and casting a piercing glance at his wife, “you

reproach your husband for rising above other men in order that he may spread beneath your feet the divine purple of renown as a trifling offering compared with the treasures of your heart? Why, then you do not know what I have done in three years! I have made gigantic strides, my Pépita!" he said with animation.

His face at that moment appeared to his wife more resplendent with the fire of genius than it had ever been with the fire of love, and she wept as she listened to him.

"I have combined chlorine and nitrogen, I have analyzed several substances hitherto considered simple, I have discovered new metals. Listen," he said, noticing his wife's tears, "I have analyzed tears. Tears contain a little phosphate of lime, chloride of sodium, mucous, and water."

He talked on, not observing the ghastly convulsion which distorted Joséphine's face; he was mounted on Science, which bore him away, with outspread wings, far from the material world.

"That analysis, my dear, is one of the strongest proofs of the theory of the Absolute. All life implies combustion. Life is more or less persistent in proportion to the activity of the blaze. Thus the destruction of minerals is indefinitely delayed, because combustion is virtual, suspended or imperceptible. Thus the vegetables, which are constantly refreshed by the combination which results in moisture, live on indefinitely, and there are several vegetables in existence which date back to the last

cataclysm. But, whenever nature has perfected a piece of apparatus, when, with some unknown purpose, it has endowed it with feeling, instinct, or intelligence, three established steps in the organic system, those three organisms demand a combustion whose activity is in direct proportion to the result obtained. Man, who represents the highest degree of intelligence, and who offers the only apparatus from which results a semi-creative power, *thought!* is that one among zoölogical creations in which combustion is found in its greatest intensity, its powerful effects being in a measure revealed by the phosphates, sulphates, and carbonates which his body furnishes according to our analysis. May not these substances be the traces left in him by the action of the electric fluid, the basis of all fertilization? Would not electricity manifest itself in him by more varied combinations than in any other animal? May he not have faculties greater than those of any other creature in order to absorb larger portions of the absolute principle, and may he not assimilate them in order to fashion his strength and his ideas therewith in a more perfect machine? I believe it. Man is a retort. For instance, according to my theory, the idiot is the man whose brain contains the smallest amount of phosphorus, or any other product of electro-magnetism; the madman, he whose brain contains too much of it; the ordinary man, he whose brain has a moderate supply; the man of genius, he whose brain is saturated with it to a suitable degree. The man who is always in love, the porter, the

dancer, the great eater, are the ones who misuse the resultant force of their electric apparatus. Thus, our sentiments—”

“Enough, Balthazar! you terrify me, you are committing sacrilege! What! my love is—”

“Ethereal matter setting itself free,” replied Claes, “and that undoubtedly is the key to the Absolute. Just think if I should be the first to find it—the first to find it—the first to find it!”

As he said the words in three different tones, his face gradually took on the expression of one inspired.

“I shall make metals! I shall make diamonds! I shall copy nature!” he cried.

“Will you be happier for it?” demanded Joséphine in despair. “Accursed science! accursed demon! You forget, Claes, that you are committing the sin of pride, of which Satan was guilty. You encroach upon God’s prerogative.”

“Oho! God!”

“He denies Him!” she cried, wringing her hands.—
“Claes, God possesses a power that you will never have.”

At that argument, which seemed to annihilate his cherished science, he gazed at his wife, trembling.

“What is that?” he asked.

“The only force, Motion. That is the one fact I have found scattered through the books you have forced me to read. Analyze flowers, fruits, Malaga wine; to be sure, you will discover their elements, which are produced like those of your water-cress, in an environment which seems foreign to them;

you can, possibly, find them in nature; but can you, by putting them together, produce those flowers, those fruits, that Malaga wine? will you control the incomprehensible effects of the sunlight? Will you obtain the atmosphere of Spain? To decompose is not to create."

"If I discover the coercive force, I shall be able to create."

"Nothing will stop him!" cried Pépita in a despairing voice. "Oh! my love, he is dead, I have ruined him."

She burst into tears, and her eyes, animated by grief and by the sanctified sentiments they expressed, gleamed more beautiful than ever through her tears.

"Yes," she continued, sobbing bitterly, "you are dead to everything. I see clearly that science is more powerful within you than yourself, and it has carried you too high in its flight for you ever to descend to be a poor woman's companion. What happiness can I offer you now? Ah! I would that I could think—it would be a melancholy sort of consolation—that God created you to make His works manifest and to sing His praises, that He confined in your breast an irresistible force which has conquered you. But no, God is good, He would leave in your heart some few thoughts for a wife who adores you, for children whom it is your duty to protect. The devil alone can assist you to walk by yourself amid those abysses from which there is no egress, amid that darkness where your path is lighted not by faith

from on high, but by a ghastly belief in your own faculties! Otherwise, would you not have noticed, my dear, that you have spent nine hundred thousand francs in three years? Oh! be just to me, you who are my god on earth, I make no reproaches. If we were alone in the world, I would bring all our wealth to your feet, and say: 'Take it, throw it into your furnace, make smoke of it!' and I would laugh to see it fly away. If you were poor, I would go out and beg, without thought of shame, to obtain the coal necessary to keep your furnace hot. Indeed, if, by throwing myself into it, I could help you to find your execrable Absolute, Claes, I would do it joyfully, since you rest your renown and your happiness on that still undiscovered secret.—But our children, Claes! our children! what will become of them if you do not soon solve this secret of hell? Do you know why Pierquin came here? He came to demand thirty thousand francs which you owe, and which you have not. Your property is no longer your own. I told him that you had the thirty thousand francs in order to spare you the embarrassment his questions would have caused you; but I thought of selling our old silverware in order to raise the money."

She saw that tears were gathering in her husband's eyes, and threw herself desperately at his feet, raising her clasped hands imploringly.

"My dear love," she cried, "cease your investigations for a moment, and let us save the money that you will need to pursue them again later if you

cannot make up your mind to abandon your work. Oh! I express no judgment upon it! I will blow your furnaces if you wish; but do not reduce our children to poverty; you cannot love them any more, for science has consumed your heart, but do not bequeath them a life of misery in exchange for the happiness you owe them. The maternal sentiment has been too often the weaker in my heart, yes, I have often wished that I were not a mother, in order that I might cleave more closely to your heart, to your life! And so, to stifle my remorse, I must plead your children's cause to you before my own."

Her hair was unloosed and fell over her shoulders, her eyes discharged innumerable sentiments like so many arrows; she triumphed over her rival. Balthazar lifted her, carried her to the couch, and took his place on the floor by her side.

"Have I really caused you such grief?" he said, in the tone of a man waking from a painful dream.

"Poor Claes, you will cause us still more in spite of yourself," she replied, passing her hand through his hair. "Come and sit by me," she said, making room for him on the couch. "See, I have forgotten everything, since you are coming back to us. We will make everything right, my love, but you won't live apart from your wife any more, will you? Say you will not. My noble, handsome Claes, let me exert over your great heart the feminine influence so essential to the happiness of unfortunate artists, of distressed great men! You can treat me roughly, you can beat me, if you choose, but allow me to

interfere with you a little for your own good. I will never abuse the power you place in my hands. Be famous, but be happy, too. Do not prefer chemistry to us! I tell you, we will be very good-natured, we will allow science to share your heart with us; but be just and give us our full half! Tell me, is not my unselfishness sublime?"

She made Balthazar smile. With the marvellous art that women possess, she had guided the most momentous of questions into the domain of pleasantries, where women are mistresses. And yet, although she seemed to laugh, her heart was so violently agitated that it could with difficulty resume its quiet, regular movement; but when she saw dawning anew in Balthazar's eyes the expression which delighted her soul, which was her glory, and which proved to her that her old power, which she thought that she had lost, was in full operation, she said to him, with a smile:

"Believe me, Balthazar, nature made us to feel, and although you insist that we are only electrical machines, your gases and your ethereal substances will never explain the gift that we possess of seeing the future."

"Yes!" he replied, "by affinities. The power of vision which makes the poet and the power of deduction which makes the scholar are founded upon visible but intangible and imponderable affinities, which ordinary men classify as moral phenomena, but which are really physical effects. The prophet sees and deduces. Unfortunately, affinities of that

sort are too rare and too imperceptible to be subjected to analysis or observation."

"And is this," she said, giving him a kiss, in order to banish chemistry, which she had so inopportunately stirred up anew, "is this an affinity?"

"No, it is a combination: two substances with the same *sign* produce no activity—"

"Hush! hush! you will break my heart," she said. "No, dear, I cannot endure to see my rival even in the transports of your love."

"But, my dear life, I am thinking only of you, my labors are the glory of my family, you are at the bottom of all my hopes."

"Look at me!"

That scene had made her as beautiful as a young woman, and of her whole person her husband saw naught but her face, above a cloud of lace and muslin.

"Yes, I did very wrong to abandon you for science. Now, when I relapse into one of my fits of preoccupation, do you rouse me from it, my Pépita; I want you to do it."

She lowered her eyes and let him take her hand, her greatest beauty, a hand at once strong and delicate.

"But I want something more," she said.

"You are so deliciously lovely that you can obtain anything."

"I want to destroy your laboratory and chain up your science," she said, her eyes flashing fire.

"Very well, to the devil with chemistry!"

“This moment wipes out all my sorrow,” she rejoined. “Now, make me suffer if you choose.”

At those words, Balthazar could not restrain his tears.

“Ah! you are right,” he said, “I saw you only through a veil, and I no longer heard you.”

“If only I myself were concerned, I would have continued to suffer in silence, without raising my voice before my king; but your sons deserve consideration, Claes. I assure you that, if you should continue to throw away your money thus, even though your aim might be a glorious one, the world would give you no credit for it, and its reprobation would fall on your children. Should it not be enough for a man of your breadth of vision that your wife has called your attention to a danger which you had not noticed? But let us say no more about all this,” she said, with a smile and glance overflowing with coquetry. “To-night, my Claes, let us not be only half happy.”

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On the day following that momentous evening in the life of that household, Balthazar Claes, from whom Joséphine had evidently obtained some promise relative to the cessation of his work, did not go up to his laboratory, but stayed with her all day. On the following day, the family made preparations for going into the country, where they remained about two months, not returning to the city until it was time to prepare for the festivities whereby Balthazar proposed to celebrate the anniversary of his wedding as he used to do. Day after day, he was confronted with additional proofs of the disorder his labors and his heedlessness had wrought in his affairs. Instead of inflaming the wound by comments, his wife constantly invented ways of palliating disasters already consummated. Of the seven servants Claes had had on the day he last received his friends, there remained only Lemulquinier, Josette the cook, and an old lady's maid named Martha, who had been with her mistress ever since she left the convent. It was impossible to receive the aristocratic society of the town with so small a retinue. Madame Claes obviated all difficulties by suggesting that they send for a cook from Paris, muster the gardener's son into the service, and borrow Pierquin's servant. Thus no one would notice their embarrassed position.

During the three weeks that the preparations lasted, Madame Claes cleverly succeeded in keeping her husband busy; at one time, she entrusted him with the task of selecting rare flowers to decorate the main stairway, the gallery, and the reception-rooms; again, she sent him to Dunkerque to obtain some of the monstrous fish which are the glory of the good housekeeper's table in the department of the North. A fête like that Claes was to give was a momentous affair which required attention to a multitude of details, and an active correspondence, in a country where the traditions of hospitality are so closely connected with family honor that, so far as masters and servants are concerned, a dinner means a victory to be won over the guests. The oysters came from Ostend, the blackcock were ordered from Scotland, the fruit from Paris; in fact, the most trivial accessories must be on a par with the family's reputation for magnificence. Furthermore, the ball at Claes House had a sort of celebrity of its own. As Douai was at that time the chief town of the department, that function opened the winter season, in a way, and set the fashion for all the others throughout the province. So Balthazar had done his best to distinguish himself in that direction for fifteen years, and he had succeeded so well that his ball was always talked about for twenty leagues around, and everyone discussed the dresses, the guests, the most insignificant details, the novelties they had noticed or the incidents that had taken place there. Thus these preparations kept Claes from thinking of the Search

for the Absolute. On returning to domestic thoughts and to social life, the scientist recovered his self-esteem as a man, as a Fleming, and as the head of a family, and took pleasure in astonishing the country. He determined to give the approaching festivity a distinctive character by some novel idea, and he selected, among all the caprices of luxury, the prettiest, the richest, the least enduring, transforming his house into a grove of rare plants, and providing bouquets for the ladies. The other details of the fête were on an equally elaborate scale, and it seemed that nothing could mar their effect. But the twenty-ninth bulletin, and the detailed news of the disasters of the Grande Armée in Russia and on the Bérésina, became known among the guests shortly after dinner. A feeling of profound and genuine sadness took possession of the good people of Douai, who, under the influence of patriotic sentiment, unanimously refused to dance.

Among the letters which reached Douai from Poland was one for Balthazar. Monsieur de Wierchowonia, then at Dresden, where he was dying, he said, of a wound received in one of the last engagements, had determined to bequeath to his former host several ideas concerning the Absolute, which had occurred to him since their meeting. That letter buried Claes in a profound reverie, which was attributed to his patriotism; but his wife was not deceived. For her the party was an occasion for mourning on two grounds. Thus that ball, during which Claes House emitted its last ray, had an

ominous and gloomy side amid all its magnificence, amid the curiosities collected by six generations, each of which had had its special mania-curiosities, which the people of Douai then admired for the last time.

The queen of the evening was Marguerite, at that time sixteen years old, whom her parents took that opportunity to introduce in society. She attracted all eyes by her extreme simplicity of manner, by her innocent expression, and, above all, by a face in perfect harmony with the house. She was the typical Flemish maiden as the painters of the country have represented her; a perfectly round, full face, chestnut hair combed smooth over the forehead, and separated into two bands; gray eyes with a greenish tinge; beautiful arms; a fulness of figure that in no wise impaired her beauty; a retiring manner, but upon her high, smooth forehead the stamp of a firm will concealed beneath apparent tranquillity and gentleness. Without being sad or melancholy, she seemed to have little playfulness in her nature. Reflection, orderliness, a keen sense of duty, the three prominent features of the Flemish character, gave animation to her face, which seemed cold at first sight, but to which the glance was impelled to return by a certain charm in its outlines, and by a placid pride which gave pledge of domestic happiness. Strangely enough,—and physiologists have never been able to explain the phenomenon,—she had not one of her father's or her mother's features, but was the living image of her maternal grandmother,

a Conyncks of Bruges, whose portrait, carefully preserved, attested the resemblance.

The supper restored some semblance of life to the party. Although the disasters that had befallen the army forbade the pleasures of the dance, everyone agreed that they should not debar the pleasures of the table. The patriots retired soon after. The indifferent ones remained, with a few card-players, and some of Claes's particular friends; but gradually that brilliantly lighted house, to which all the notabilities of Douai had thronged, relapsed into silence; and about one o'clock in the morning the gallery was deserted, and the lights were extinguished in one salon after another. At last, that inner courtyard, for a moment so noisy, so flooded with light, became dark and gloomy once more: a prophetic image of the future in store for the family. When the Claes returned to their apartments, Balthazar gave his wife the Pole's letter to read; she returned it to him with a melancholy gesture, she foresaw the future.

In truth, after that evening, Balthazar dissembled but feebly the disappointment and *ennui* by which he was overwhelmed. In the morning, after the family breakfast, he would play with his son Jean in the parlor for a moment or two, and talk with his two daughters, busy with their sewing, embroidery, or lacemaking; but he soon wearied of the games and the chatting; indeed, he seemed to accomplish them as a duty. When his wife came down again after dressing, she always found him sitting in the easy-chair, gazing at Marguerite and Félicie, exhibiting no

impatience at the noise of their bobbins. When the newspaper came, he read it slowly, like a retired tradesman who finds it hard work to kill time. Then he would leave his chair, look out at the sky through the window, sit down again and poke the fire dreamily, like a man whom the tyranny of his ideas deprives of all consciousness of his movements.

Madame Claes bitterly regretted her lack of education and memory. It was difficult for her to sustain an interesting conversation at any length; indeed it may be doubted whether that is possible between any two persons who have said everything to each other and are compelled to go outside of the life of the heart or of material life in search of subjects to divert their thoughts. The life of the heart has its own moments, and demands contrasts; the details of material life cannot long engross superior minds accustomed to decide promptly; and the world is insupportable to loving hearts. Two solitary mortals, who know each other through and through, ought, therefore, to seek their entertainment in the most elevated realms of thought, for it is impossible to contrast the petty with the immense. Moreover, when a man is accustomed to deal with great themes, he becomes hard to amuse unless he retains in the depths of his heart that principle of innocence, that freedom from constraint which makes men of genius so charmingly childlike; but this childishness of the heart is a phenomenon very rare in those whose mission it is to see everything, to know everything, to understand everything.

During the first few months, Madame Claes extricated herself from that critical situation by superhuman efforts suggested by her love or by necessity. At one time, she determined to learn backgammon, which she had never been able to play, and performed the prodigious, albeit readily conceivable feat of becoming an expert; at another time, she aroused Balthazar's interest in the education of his daughters by asking him to guide them in their reading. But those resources were eventually exhausted. There came a time when Joséphine was in the same quandary with reference to Balthazar that confronted Madame de Maintenon with reference to Louis XIV.; but she had not, to amuse her surfeited lord, the pomp of power nor the wiles of a court which could play such comedies as those of the Siamese ambassador or of the Sofi of Persia. The monarch, reduced, after having squandered the treasures of France, to the expedients of a younger son in order to procure money, no longer had in his favor youth or the prestige of success, and was conscious of a horrible helplessness amid his grandeur; the royal governess, who had the knack of soothing children, was not always able to soothe the father, who suffered because he had abused men and things, life and God. But Claes suffered from excess of power. Oppressed by a thought which held him fast, he dreamed of the pomps and vanities of science, of treasures for mankind, of glory for himself. He suffered as an artist suffers in a hand-to-hand struggle with poverty, as Samson suffered

when bound to the pillars of the temple. The effect was the same in the case of both sovereigns, although the intellectual monarch was crushed by his strength, the other by his weakness.

What could Pépita do, single-handed, against that scientific homesickness, so to speak? After she had exhausted all the resources afforded by domestic occupations, she summoned society to her assistance by giving two *coffee-parties* each week. At Douai, the *coffee-party* takes the place of the *tea-party*. A coffee-party is an entertainment at which the guests throughout an entire evening regale themselves with sweets, drink iced *café noir* or *café au lait*, and the exquisite wines and liqueurs with which the cellars are filled to overflowing in that blessed land; while the women sing ballads, discuss their toilets, or exchange the momentous nothings of current gossip. These functions are copies of Mieris's or Terburg's pictures, minus the red feathers in the conical gray hats, minus the guitars and beautiful costumes of the sixteenth century. But the efforts that Balthazar made to act well his part as master of the house, his forced affability, the sudden flashes of his wit, all betrayed the gravity of his mental condition by the fatigue he exhibited on the following day.

These constant festivities, ineffectual remedies, demonstrated the serious nature of the disease. These branches, which Balthazar grasped as he rolled over the precipice, retarded his fall, but made it the heavier. Although he never mentioned his former occupations, although he never uttered a

word of regret because he had placed himself in such a position that it was impossible for him to renew his experiments, he had the feeble voice, the melancholy attitude, the apparent prostration of a convalescent. His *ennui* sometimes displayed itself in the way in which he would take the tongs and absent-mindedly build some fanciful figure on the hearth with bits of burned wood. When evening came, his satisfaction was very perceptible: sleep delivered him, doubtless, from some persistent thought; but on the morrow he would rise sadly, feeling that there was another day to be lived through, and he seemed to measure the time he had to consume as a weary traveller scans the desert that he has to cross.

If Madame Claes knew the cause of that apathetic condition, she did her utmost to shut her eyes to the extent of its ravages. Brave as she was against mental suffering, she was helpless against the generous impulses of the heart. She dared not question Balthazar when he was listening to the conversation of his daughters and to Jean's merry laughter with the air of a man engrossed by other thoughts; but she shuddered when she saw him shake off his melancholy mood, and, guided by a generous impulse, try to appear cheerful in order not to depress those about him. The father's attempts at coquetry with his daughters and his games with Jean caused Joséphine's eyes to fill with tears, and she would leave the room to conceal the emotion aroused by a heroism the price of which is well known to women and which breaks their hearts. At such times, Madame

Claes longed to say: "Kill me, and then do what you choose!" Balthazar's eyes insensibly lost their brilliancy and fire, and assumed the sea-green tint which makes the eyes of old men painful to look upon. His attentions to his wife, his speech, everything about him was marked by heaviness. These symptoms, which became more alarming toward the close of April, terrified Madame Claes, to whom the spectacle was intolerable, and who reproached herself again and again as she admired the Flemish loyalty with which her husband kept his word. One day, when Balthazar seemed more prostrated than she had ever seen him, she no longer hesitated to sacrifice everything to restore him to life.

"My dear," she said, "I release you from your oath."

Balthazar stared at her with a bewildered air.

"Are you thinking about your experiments?" she continued.

He replied with a gesture of terrifying ardor. Madame Claes, far from remonstrating with him in any way, although she had carefully measured the depth of the abyss into which they were both about to fall, took his hand and pressed it, with a smiling face.

"I thank you, my dear, I am sure of my power," she said. "You have sacrificed more than your life to me. Now it is my turn to make sacrifices! Although I have sold some of my diamonds, there are still enough left, with the addition of those left me by my brother, to procure the money necessary for your labors. I intended the jewels for our two

daughters; but your glory will be a more brilliant ornament for them! moreover, some day you will give them more beautiful diamonds!"

The joy which suddenly shone in her husband's face put the finishing touch to Joséphine's despair; she saw with intense pain that his passion was stronger than he. Claes had confidence enough in his work to walk without trembling along a path which in his wife's eyes was a yawning abyss. To him, faith; to her, doubt; and hers was the heavier burden: does not the woman always suffer for the two? At that moment, she forced herself to believe in his success, trying to justify to herself her complicity in the probable squandering of their fortune.

"The love of my whole life would not suffice to express my gratitude for your devotion, Pépita," said Claes, deeply moved.

He had hardly uttered the words, when Marguerite and Félicie entered the room and bade them good-morning. Madame Claes looked down, and was speechless for a moment before her two daughters, whose fortune had been alienated for the benefit of a chimera; whereas her husband took them on his knees and talked joyously with them, overjoyed to be able to find a vent for the joy which oppressed him.

Thenceforth Madame Claes entered into her husband's ardent life. Her children's future, her husband's reputation, were to her two springs of action as powerful as science and renown were to Claes. So the unhappy woman no longer had an

hour's tranquillity after the family diamonds were all sold in Paris through the medium of her confessor, the Abbé de Solis, and the manufacturers of chemicals had renewed their shipments. Constantly excited by the demon of science and by the mania for experiments which consumed her husband, she lived in continual suspense, and was as if dead for whole days, held fast in her easy-chair by the very violence of her longings, which, as they did not, like Balthazar's, find food in laboratory work, tormented her mind by acting constantly upon her doubts and fears. At times, reproaching herself for her indulgence for a passion whose end was impossible of attainment and which Monsieur de Solis condemned, she would leave her chair, go to the window on the inner courtyard, and look up with terror at the laboratory chimney. If smoke were pouring from it, she would gaze at it in despair, her heart and mind stirred to their depths by the most contrary ideas. She saw her children's fortune flying away in smoke, but she was saving their father's life: was it not her first duty to make him happy? That last thought would calm her for a moment.

She had obtained permission to enter the laboratory and to remain there; but she was soon compelled to forego that melancholy satisfaction. Her suffering there was too intense when she saw that Balthazar paid no attention to her and often seemed annoyed by her presence; she was tortured by impatient jealousy, by a cruel impulse to blow the house to pieces; she felt there as if she were dying

of a thousand horrible diseases. Thereafter Lemulquinier served her as a sort of barometer; if she heard him whistling as he went back and forth serving breakfast or dinner, she guessed that her husband's experiments had turned out well, and that he hoped for speedy success; if Lemulquinier were downcast and gloomy, she gazed at him despairingly: Balthazar was dissatisfied. The mistress and the valet had ended by understanding each other, despite the pride of the one and the cunning humility of the other. Weak and defenceless against the terrible, prostrating blows of thought, she succumbed beneath those alternatives of hope and despair which, in her case, were made heavier by the solicitude of the loving wife, and the anxiety of the mother trembling for her family. The depressing silence which formerly froze her heart, she helped now to produce, heedless of the air of gloom that prevailed in the house, and of the long days she passed in that parlor, without a smile, often without a word. Guided by a pathetic maternal presentiment, she accustomed her daughters to housework, and tried to make them skilful enough in some woman's craft to enable them to live by it if they should be reduced to poverty.

Thus the apparent tranquillity of that household concealed terrible agitation. Toward the end of the summer, Balthazar had spent the proceeds of the diamonds sold at Paris through the medium of the Abbé de Solis, and owed Protez and Chiffreville something like twenty thousand francs.

*

In August, 1813, about a year after the scene with which this narrative opens, although Claes had made some fine experiments, upon which, unfortunately, he looked with contempt, his efforts had been barren of results so far as the principal object of his investigations was concerned. On the day on which he completed his series of experiments, the consciousness of his powerlessness crushed him; the knowledge that he had wasted large sums to no purpose drove him to despair. It was a dire catastrophe. He left his garret, went slowly downstairs to the parlor, threw himself into an armchair, amid his children, and sat there for some moments, as if dead, without answering the questions with which his wife overwhelmed him; his eyes filled with tears, and he went hurriedly to his own apartments in order that there might be no witnesses to his grief; Joséphine followed him and led him into her bedroom, and there, alone with her, Balthazar gave vent to his despair. Those tears from a man's eyes, those lamentations of a discouraged artist, the regrets of the husband and father, had an accent of terror, of affection, of madness, which caused Madame Claes more pain than all her past sorrows had done. The victim consoled the executioner. When Balthazar said in a heart-rending tone of conviction: "I am a miserable

wretch, I am jeopardizing my children's lives and yours, and, to make you happy once more, there is nothing for me to do but to kill myself!" those words pierced her to the heart, and as her knowledge of her husband's character made her fear that he would at once carry out that suggestion of his despair, she experienced one of those inward revolutions which derange life at its source, and which was the more disastrous to Pépita because she dissembled its violent effects by assuming a deceitful calmness.

"My dear," she replied, "I have consulted, not Pierquin, whose friendship is not so great that he does not feel a secret pleasure in the knowledge that we are ruined, but an old man who is as kind as a father to me. Abbé de Solis, my confessor, has given me some advice which will save us from ruin. He has been here to look at the pictures. The price of those in the gallery will probably be sufficient to pay off all the mortgages on your property, and what you owe Protez and Chiffreville, for, of course, you have an account to settle with them?"

Claes assented by hanging his head, on which the hair had become quite white.

"Monsieur de Solis knows the Happes and the Dunckers, of Amsterdam; they are wild over pictures, and, like all parvenus, are most anxious to display a magnificence which is permitted only to old families; they will pay for our pictures all that they are worth. Thus we shall recover our income, and you can take a portion of the price, which will be something like a hundred thousand ducats, to

continue your experiments. Your two daughters and myself will be content with very little. With time and economy we will fill the empty frames with other pictures, and you will be happy!"

Balthazar raised his eyes to his wife's with joy mingled with dread. Their rôles were changed. The wife became the husband's protector. That man, who was naturally so affectionate and whose heart was so closely knit to Joséphine's, held her in his arms, blind to the horrible convulsion that made her quiver from head to foot, and affected her hair and lips with a nervous trembling.

"I did not dare to tell you that there is barely a hair's-breadth between myself and the Absolute. In order to gasify metals, I have only to find a method of subjecting them to an immense heat where the presence of the atmosphere is nil, that is to say, in an absolute vacuum."

Madame Claes could not endure the egotism of that reply. She expected passionate thanks for her sacrifices, and received a problem in chemistry! She left her husband abruptly, went down to the parlor, threw herself upon a chair between her two frightened daughters, and burst into tears; Marguerite and Félicie each took a hand and knelt, one on each side of the chair, weeping with her, although they did not know the cause of her chagrin, and asked her again and again:

"What is the matter, mother dear?"

"Poor children! I am dead, I feel it."

That reply made Marguerite shudder, for she

noticed for the first time on her mother's face signs of the pallor peculiar to persons of dark complexion.

"Martha! Martha!" cried Félicie, "come, mamma wants you."

The old duenna ran from the kitchen, and, seeing the greenish pallor upon that olive face, usually so richly colored:

"Body of Christ!" she cried in Spanish, "madame is dying."

She rushed from the room, told Josette to heat some water for a foot-bath, and returned to her mistress.

"Don't alarm monsieur, say nothing to him, Martha," cried Madame Claes.—"Poor, dear girls," she added, pressing Marguerite and Félicie to her heart with a despairing gesture, "I would that I might live long enough to see you married and happy.—Martha," she continued, "tell Lemulquinier to go to Monsieur de Solis and ask him from me to come here."

That terrible shock necessarily found an echo in the kitchen. Josette and Martha, both of whom were devoted to Madame Claes and her daughters, were wounded in the only affection they knew. Those terrible words: "Madame is dying, monsieur must have killed her! make a mustard foot-bath quick!" had caused Josette to express several ejaculatory phrases with which she overwhelmed Lemulquinier. Lemulquinier, unmoved and insensible, was eating at a corner of the table in front of one of the windows through which the light came from the courtyard

into the kitchen, where everything was as neat as in a dainty woman's boudoir.

"It was sure to end so," said Josette, glancing at the *valet de chambre* as she stepped on a stool to take from a shelf a kettle that shone like gold. "There's no mother who can look on coolly while a father amuses himself throwing away such a fortune as monsieur's to make dish-water."

Josette, whose head, surmounted by a round cap with ruffles, resembled that of a German nut-cracker, cast at Lemulquinier a sour glance which the greenish hue of her little bloodshot eyes made almost venomous. The old valet shrugged his shoulders with a gesture worthy of Mirabeau when annoyed, then stuffed into his huge mouth a slice of bread-and-butter spread with an *appétizer*.

"Instead of worrying monsieur, madame ought to give him some money; we shall all of us be rich enough before long to swim in gold! We're no farther away than the thickness of a sou from finding what we're looking after."

"Very well, you have twenty thousand francs put away, why don't you offer them to monsieur? He's your master! And as long as you're so sure of his acts and manœuvring—"

"You don't know what you're talking about, Josette; just heat your water," retorted the Fleming, interrupting the cook.

"I know enough about it to know that there were thousands of ounces of silver plate here, that you and your master have melted it all, and that, if you go

on as you're going, you'll use everything up so completely that there'll soon be nothing left."

"And monsieur," said Martha, returning, "will kill madame to get rid of a wife who holds him back and prevents his swallowing up everything. He's possessed of the devil, that's plain enough!—The least thing that you risk in helping him, Lemulquinier, is your soul, if you have one, for you're like a lump of ice while everybody in the house is in despair. The young ladies are weeping like Magdalens. Go and fetch Monsieur l'Abbé de Solis!"

"I have something to do for monsieur, to put the laboratory in order," said the valet. "It's too far from here to the Esquerchin quarter. Go yourself."

"Look at that monster!" said Martha. "Who will give madame her foot-bath? Do you propose to leave her to die? the blood has gone to her head."

"Mulquinier," said Marguerite, coming into the room adjoining the kitchen, "on your way back from Monsieur de Solis, stop and ask Monsieur Pierquin, the doctor, to come at once."

"Hein! you'll go, I fancy," said Josette.

"Mademoiselle, monsieur told me to arrange his laboratory," rejoined Lemulquinier, turning to the women and glaring at them with a despotic expression.

"Father," said Marguerite to Monsieur Claes, who came downstairs at that moment, "can't you

let us have Mulquinier to do an errand in the town?"

"Now you will go, you vile Chinaman!" said Martha, when she heard Monsieur Claes place Lemulquinier at his daughter's orders.

The valet's lack of devotion to the interests of the family was a prolific subject of dispute between the two women and Lemulquinier, whose lukewarmness had resulted in increasing the mutual attachment of Josette and the duenna. That conflict, unimportant as it apparently was, had a considerable influence on the future of that family when, later, they were in need of assistance against misfortune.

Balthazar had become once more so distraught that he did not observe Joséphine's ailing condition. He took Jean and tossed him up and down mechanically, thinking of the problem that it now seemed possible for him to solve. He saw the foot-bath brought to his wife, who, lacking strength to rise from the easy-chair in which she was reclining, had remained in the parlor. He even watched his two daughters waiting upon their mother, without seeking an explanation of their zealous attentions. When Marguerite or Jean essayed to speak, Madame Claes enjoined silence upon them by pointing to Balthazar. Such a scene was likely to afford much food for thought to Marguerite, who, being placed between her father and mother, so to speak, was old enough and intelligent enough to appreciate their conduct. There comes a time in the domestic life

of families, when the children become, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, the judges of their parents. Madame Claes had realized the danger of that condition of affairs. Through love for Balthazar, she did her utmost to justify in Marguerite's eyes what might appear, to the just mind of a girl of sixteen, a father's faults.

Thus the profound respect for Balthazar which Madame Claes exhibited at that time, effacing herself before him in order not to disturb his meditations, inspired her children with a sort of awe of the paternal majesty. But that devotion, contagious as it was, magnified Marguerite's affection for her mother, to whom she was closely united by all the incidents of their daily life. That sentiment was based upon a sort of divination of sufferings, the cause of which a young girl would naturally seek to learn. No human power could prevent a word from falling, now and then, from Martha or Josette, which revealed to Marguerite the origin of the condition of affairs in the household for the past four years. Notwithstanding Madame Claes's reticence, therefore, her daughter discovered little by little, thread by thread, the mysterious woof of that domestic drama. Marguerite was destined to be ere long her mother's jealous confidante, and, when the crisis should come, the most redoubtable of judges. So that Madame Claes turned all her attention upon Marguerite, to whom she strove to communicate her sentiment of devotion to Balthazar. The firmness of will, the good sense which she found in her

daughter, made her shudder at the idea of a possible conflict between Marguerite and Balthazar, when, after her death, the former should take her place in the management of the household.

So it was that the poor woman had reached a point where she was more dismayed by the probable results of her death than by the thought of death itself. Her solicitude for Balthazar made itself manifest in the resolution she had formed. By freeing her husband's property from incumbrances, she assured his independence, and anticipated any possible discussion as to separating her interests from her children's; she hoped to see him happy so long as she lived; then she expected to transfer the delicate sentiments of her heart to Marguerite, who would continue to play the part of an angel of love by his side, exercising a tutelary and protecting influence over the family. Thus her love would still shine from the grave on those who were dear to her. She did not choose, however, to lower the father in the daughter's eyes by admitting her prematurely to a share in the fears which Balthazar's scientific mania aroused in her own mind; she studied Marguerite's heart and disposition to ascertain whether she would become through her own nature a mother to her brothers and sister, a gentle and loving wife to her father. Thus Madame Claes's last days were poisoned by scheming and by fears which she dared not confide to anyone. Feeling that that last scene had dealt a blow at the very foundations of her life, she cast her eyes into the

future; while Balthazar, heedless thenceforth of fortune, economy, domestic sentiments, thought about finding the Absolute.

The profound silence that reigned in the parlor was broken only by the monotonous tapping of Claes's foot, which he continued to move up and down, not noticing that Jean had left him. Sitting beside her mother, and closely watching her pale, distorted face, Marguerite turned, from time to time, to her father, amazed at his insensibility. Soon they heard the street-door open and shut, and Abbé de Solis appeared, leaning on his nephew's arm and walking slowly across the courtyard.

"Ah! there's Monsieur Emmanuel," said Félicie.

"He is a most excellent young man!" remarked Madame Claes, when she saw Emmanuel de Solis, "I am very glad to see him again."

Marguerite blushed when she heard her mother's eulogistic words. Two days before, the sight of that young man had awakened unfamiliar sentiments in her heart, and aroused in her mind thoughts hitherto dormant. During the confessor's visit to his penitent, some of those imperceptible events had occurred which have an important bearing on the future, and their results were sufficiently momentous to require a few words at this point as to the new personages introduced into that family circle.

It was Madame Claes's principle to perform her devotions in secret. Her confessor was almost a stranger in the house, having been there but once before; but, there as elsewhere, everyone was conscious

of a thrill of emotion and admiration at sight of the uncle and his nephew. Abbé de Solis, an old man of eighty, with silvery hair, had an aged face, in which all the life seemed to have taken refuge in the eyes. He walked with difficulty, for one of his slender legs ended in a horribly deformed foot, which he wore in a sort of bag of velvet, and which compelled him to use a crutch when he had not his nephew's arm. His bent back, his withered body, presented the spectacle of a frail and diseased frame dominated by an iron will and by a pure, devout spirit which had preserved it. That Spanish priest, remarkable by reason of his vast learning, his genuine piety, his very extensive knowledge of men and things, had been successively a Dominican friar, Grand Penitentiary of Toledo, and Vicar-General of the Archbishopric of Malines. Had not the French Revolution occurred, the influence of the Casa-Reals would have raised him to the highest dignities in the Church, but his grief at the death of the young duke, his pupil, disgusted him with active life, and he devoted himself entirely to the education of his nephew, who was left an orphan at a very early age.

At the time of the conquest of Belgium, he had taken up his abode near Madame Claes. From his youth, Abbé de Solis had professed an enthusiastic veneration for Sainte-Thérèse, which led him, as did the natural bent of his mind, toward the mystic portions of the Christian faith. Finding in Flanders, where Mademoiselle Bourignon, as well as the writers of the Illuminati and Quietists, made most converts, a

party of Catholics who shared his beliefs, he remained there, the more readily because he was looked upon as a patriarch by that peculiar sect, who continue to follow the doctrines of the mystics despite the censure visited upon Fénelon and Madame Guyon. His morals were rigid, his life was exemplary, and he was supposed to have trances. Although so strict a churchman would naturally hold entirely aloof from worldly affairs, his affection for his nephew made him careful of his interests. When any charitable work was under consideration, the old man levied a contribution on his faithful disciples before having recourse to his own fortune, and his patriarchal authority was so fully recognized, his purposes were so pure, his perspicacity so rarely at fault, that everyone complied with his demands. To convey an idea of the contrast between the uncle and the nephew, we may compare the old man to one of the hollow willows vegetating on the bank of a stream, and the young man to the eglantine, laden with flowers, whose straight, graceful stalk springs from the bosom of the moss-covered trunk, which it seems to try to straighten.

Strictly brought up by his uncle, who kept him under his wing as a mother keeps a maiden, Emmanuel was full to overflowing of that keen sensitiveness, that half-dreamy innocence, which are ephemeral flowers of youth in every mortal, but fresh in minds nurtured upon religious principles. The old priest had restrained the expression of worldly sentiments in his pupil, preparing him for

the sufferings of life by constant toil, by discipline almost monastic in its severity. That education, which was destined to turn Emmanuel over to the world entirely unsophisticated, and to make him happy if he should be fortunate in his first attachments, had invested him with an angelic purity which gave to his personality the charm peculiar to young girls. His eyes, timid in appearance, but instinct with a strong and courageous soul, cast a light which vibrated in the heart as the sound of a bell sends its undulations through the delicate mechanism of the ear. His expressive, though regular, features were remarkable for extraordinary precision of contour, for the harmonious blending of the lines, and for the profound tranquillity due to perfect peace of mind. There was nothing inharmonious. His black hair, his brown eyes and eyebrows, heightened the effect of a fair complexion and brilliant coloring. His voice was what one would expect with such a handsome face. His feminine movements harmonized with his melodious voice, with the soft radiance of his glance. He seemed entirely unconscious of the attraction exerted by the semi-melancholy reserve of his manner, his modest speech, and the respectful attentions he lavished on his uncle. Seeing him carefully observing the old abbé's tortuous gait in order to adapt himself to his painful deviations from a straight line, and not interfere with them, looking ahead for anything that might hurt his feet, and selecting the best path for him, it was impossible not to recognize in Emmanuel the generous

sentiments which make of man a sublime creature. He seemed so great, loving his uncle without presuming to judge him, obeying him without ever discussing his orders, that everyone seemed to discover a case of predestination in the sweet name his god-mother had given him. Whenever, in his own house or elsewhere, the old man exhibited the despotic Dominican spirit, Emmanuel would raise his head with such a noble gesture, as if to show what strength he could put forth if he were at odds with any other man, that men of heart were deeply moved as artists are at sight of a great work, for noble sentiments ring no less loudly in the heart in obedience to living conceptions than in obedience to the idealizations of art!

Emmanuel had accompanied his uncle when he visited his penitent to examine the pictures at Claes House. Learning from Martha that Abbé de Solis was in the gallery, Marguerite, who was very anxious to see that famous man, had sought some false excuse for joining her mother in order to gratify her curiosity. Entering the gallery hastily, affecting the giddiness beneath which young girls so effectually conceal their real wishes, she had found, beside the bent, deformed, cadaverous old man, dressed in black, the fresh, refined face of Emmanuel. The glances of those two, equally youthful, equally ingenuous, had expressed the same astonishment. Doubtless, Emmanuel and Marguerite had already met in their dreams. Both lowered their eyes and raised them again simultaneously, giving expression to the same confession. Marguerite took her

THE GALLERY AT CLAES HOUSE

Emmanuel had accompanied his uncle when he visited his penitent to examine the pictures at Claes House. Learning from Martha that Abbé de Solis was in the gallery, Marguerite, who was very anxious to see that famous man, had sought some false excuse for joining her mother in order to gratify her curiosity.



mother's arm and talked to her in an undertone to keep herself in countenance,—sheltered herself, so to speak, beneath the maternal wing, stretching her neck with a swanlike movement for another glance at Emmanuel, who had not released his uncle's arm. Although skilfully arranged so as to give each canvas its full value, the dim light in the gallery favored those stealthy glances which are the delight of timid persons. Doubtless, neither of them went so far, even in thought, as the *if* with which passions begin; but they both felt that profound emotion which stirs the heart to its depths, and of which, in youth, one keeps the secret to one's self, from delicacy or from modesty.

The first impression, which causes the overflow of feelings long restrained, is followed in all young people by the half-stupefied amazement which children feel when they first hear music. Some laugh and think; others do not laugh until after they have thought; but those whose hearts are summoned to live on poesy or love listen a long while, and call for a repetition of the melody by a glance wherein pleasure is already kindled, or curiosity concerning the infinite begins to appear. If we feel an irresistible love for the places where, in our childhood, we were made acquainted with the beauties of harmony, if we remember with delight both the musician and the instrument, how can we avoid loving the being who first reveals to us the music of life? Is not the first heart wherein we have breathed love, like a fatherland? Emmanuel and Marguerite were to

each other that melodious voice which awakens sensibility, the hand which puts aside veils of mist and reveals shores bathed by the fires of the South.

When Madame Claes detained the old man in front of a picture by Guido representing an angel, Marguerite put her head forward to see what impression it would produce upon Emmanuel, and the young man's eyes sought Marguerite's to compare the mute thought of the canvas to the living thought of the living creature. That involuntary and charming flattery was understood and relished to the full. The old abbé gravely praised the beautiful work, and Madame Claes answered him; but the two children were silent. Such was their meeting. The mysterious light in the gallery, the peace reigning in the house, the presence of the older people, all contributed to engrave more deeply in their hearts the delicate hues of that vaporous mirage. The innumerable confused thoughts which had rained upon Marguerite subsided, formed a sort of transparent expanse in her mind, and were bathed in a ray of brilliant light when Emmanuel stammered a few words as he took leave of Madame Claes. That voice, whose fresh, smooth tones diffused a most extraordinary charm through the heart, completed the sudden revelation which Emmanuel had caused and which was destined to bear fruit to his benefit; for the man of whom destiny makes use to awaken love in a young girl's heart is often in ignorance of what he is doing and leaves his work unfinished. Marguerite bowed, speechless with emotion, and

said adieu in a glance which seemed to express regret for the vanishing of that pure and charming vision. Like the child, she wanted her melody to continue. The adieus were said at the foot of the old staircase in front of the old parlor door; and, when she entered the parlor, she looked after the uncle and the nephew until the parlor door had closed upon them. Madame Claes had been too much engrossed in the serious subjects discussed in her conference with her confessor, to think of scrutinizing her daughter's face.

When Monsieur de Solis and his nephew appeared the next time, she was still too intensely agitated to notice the flush that rose to Marguerite's cheeks, betraying the fermentation of the first pleasure in a virgin heart. When the old abbé was announced, Marguerite had resumed her work, and seemed to be attending so closely to it, that she bowed to the uncle and the nephew without looking at them. Monsieur Claes mechanically returned the salutation of Abbé de Solis, and left the parlor like one called elsewhere by his duties. The pious Dominican had taken his seat beside his penitent, bestowing upon her one of those searching glances with which he probed men's souls; the sight of Monsieur Claes and his wife together was enough to enable him to divine an impending catastrophe.

"Go into the garden, children," said the mother. "Marguerite, show Emmanuel your father's tulips."

Marguerite, half-abashed, took Félicie's arm and glanced at the young man, who blushed and left the

parlor, taking Jean along to keep himself in countenance. When they were all four in the garden, Félicie and Jean went their own way, leaving Marguerite practically alone with young de Solis; she led him to the tulip-bed, arranged every year in exactly the same way by Lemulquinier.

“Do you like tulips?” asked Marguerite, after a moment of the most profound silence, which Emmanuel seemed disinclined to break.

“They are beautiful flowers, mademoiselle, but, in order to love them, one must have the taste for them, must be able to appreciate their beauties. They dazzle me. The habit of work in the dark little room in which I live at my uncle’s doubtless leads me to prefer those which are softer to the eye.”

As he said the last words, he glanced at Marguerite, but that glance, overflowing with vague desires, contained no allusion to the mellow whiteness, the placidity, the soft coloring, which made that face a flower.

“Do you work very much?” rejoined Marguerite, leading Emmanuel to a green wooden bench, furnished with a back. “From here,” she continued, “you will not see the tulips at such close range, and they will tire your eyes less. You are right, those colors are glaring and unpleasant.”

“Yes, I work a great deal!” replied the young man, after a moment’s silence, during which he smoothed the gravel in the path with his foot. “I work at all sorts of things. My uncle wanted to make me a priest.”

“Oh!” said Marguerite, artlessly.

“I objected, I felt no vocation for it. But it required a great deal of courage to oppose my uncle’s wishes. He is so kind, he loves me so dearly! He lately hired a substitute to save me from the conscription, me, a poor orphan—”

“What profession do you mean to adopt?” asked Marguerite; but she instantly made a gesture as if she would withdraw the question, and added: “I beg your pardon, monsieur, you must think me very inquisitive!”

“Oh! mademoiselle,” said Emmanuel, looking at her with no less tenderness than admiration, “no one except my uncle ever asked me that question. I am studying to be a professor. What would you have? I am not rich. If I become principal of a college in Flanders, I shall have enough to live modestly, and I shall marry some humble woman whom I will love dearly. Such is the life that I have in prospect. Perhaps that is why I prefer a field-daisy over which everybody walks in the plain of Orchies, to these beautiful tulips, brilliant with gold and purple and sapphire and emerald, which represent a life of luxury, just as the daisy represents a placid, patriarchal life, the life of a poor professor such as I shall be.”

“I have always called daisies marguerites,” she said.

Emmanuel de Solis blushed furiously, and cudgelled his brain for a reply, stirring up the gravel with his feet. Perplexed as to the best choice to

make among all the ideas which came to his mind, and which seemed idiotic to him, and disconcerted by his own delay in replying, he said: "I dared not pronounce your name—" then stopped.

"Professor!" she rejoined.

"Oh! mademoiselle, I shall be a professor in order to have a profession, but I shall undertake works which may make me of far greater service to mankind. I have a great liking for historical works."

"Ah!"

That *ah!* overflowing with secret thoughts, made the young man still more shamefaced, and he began to laugh foolishly, saying:

"You make me talk about myself, mademoiselle, when I would like to talk to you about nothing but yourself."

"My mother and your uncle have finished their conversation, I believe," she said, looking at the parlor window.

"It seemed to me that your mother was greatly changed."

"She suffers, but will not tell us the cause of her suffering, and we can do nothing but sympathize with her unhappiness."

Madame Claes had, in fact, finished a consultation upon a delicate subject, a case of conscience which only Abbé de Solis could decide. Foreseeing utter ruin, she wished, unknown to Balthazar, who gave but little thought to his affairs, to set aside a considerable sum out of the proceeds of the pictures

which Monsieur de Solis undertook to sell in Holland, to be held in reserve for the moment when the family should be in want. After mature deliberation, and after being made thoroughly acquainted with the plight in which his penitent found herself, the old Dominican gave his approval to that prudent step. He took his leave of her to give his attention to the sale, which must be effected secretly in order to injure Monsieur Claes's reputation as little as possible.

The old man sent his nephew, armed with a letter of recommendation, to Amsterdam, where the young man, overjoyed to render a service to the family of Claes, succeeded in selling the pictures in the gallery to Happe and Duncker, the famous bankers, for the ostensible price of eighty-five thousand Holland ducats, to which were added fifteen thousand more to be given secretly to Madame Claes. The pictures were so well known that nothing more was needed to consummate the sale than Balthazar's reply to the letter Messrs. Happe and Duncker wrote to him. Emmanuel de Solis was authorized by Claes to receive the money for the pictures, which were shipped secretly, so that all knowledge of the sale might be concealed from the town of Douai.

In the latter part of September, Balthazar repaid the sums which had been lent to him, redeemed his property, and resumed his labors; but Claes House was bereft of its loveliest adornment. Blinded by his passion, he showed no sign of regret; he felt so confident that he should soon be able to repair that loss, that he had made the sale subject to his right

of redemption. A hundred painted canvases were nothing in Joséphine's eyes compared with domestic happiness and her husband's satisfaction; she filled the galleries with the pictures that hung in the reception-rooms, and changed the arrangement of the furniture in the house on the street, to conceal the void left by their removal. When his debts were paid, Balthazar had about two hundred thousand francs on hand with which to renew his experiments. Monsieur l'Abbé de Solis and his nephew held in trust the fifteen thousand ducats reserved by Madame Claes. To increase that sum, the abbé sold the ducats which the events of the Continental war had advanced to a premium. One hundred and sixty-six thousand francs in crown-pieces were buried in the cellar of the house occupied by Abbé de Solis.

Madame Claes had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing her husband constantly occupied for nearly eight months. But the blow he had dealt her was too severe for her strength, and she fell into a decline, in which her condition necessarily became worse. Science absorbed Balthazar so completely that neither the reverses experienced by France, nor the first fall of Napoléon, nor the return of the Bourbons, lured him from his occupation; he was neither husband nor father nor citizen; he was a chemist.

Toward the close of the year 1814, Madame Claes was so far gone with consumption that she could not leave her bed. Not wishing to languish in her bedroom, where she had been so happy, where the reminders of her vanished happiness would have given

rise to involuntary comparisons with the present which would have torn her heart, she remained in the parlor. The doctors had approved her heartfelt wish, considering that room more airy, more cheerful, and more suitable for one in her condition than her bedroom. The bed on which the unfortunate woman ended her days stood between the fireplace and the window looking on the garden. There she passed her last days, devoutly occupied in perfecting the souls of her two daughters, upon which it gave her untold pleasure to allow the bright light of her own to shine. When conjugal love is impeded in its manifestations, it allows the maternal love to display itself. The mother showed herself the more charming for her delay in giving expression to her mother-love. Like all noble-minded persons, she was conscious of a supreme delicacy of sentiment which she took for remorse. Believing that she had deprived her children of some affection that was due to them, she sought to redeem her imaginary faults, and lavished loving attentions upon them which made her doubly dear to them; she tried, in a certain sense, to make them live the life of her heart, to shelter them with her failing wings, and to love them in one day for all the days she had neglected them. Suffering gave to her caresses and her words an unctuous warmth which came from her soul. Her eyes rested caressingly on her children before her voice moved their hearts by words overflowing with loving-kindness, and her hand seemed always to be pouring benedictions upon them.

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If, after momentarily resuming its habit of magnificent entertaining, Claes House soon ceased to receive guests, if its isolation became more complete, if Balthazar no longer celebrated his wedding anniversary with a fête, the town of Douai was not surprised. In the first place, Madame Claes's illness seemed a sufficient reason for that change; then, too, the payment of Balthazar's debts imposed silence upon evil-speaking; and, finally, the political vicissitudes which Flanders was compelled to undergo, the war of the Hundred Days, the foreign occupation, caused Balthazar to be completely forgotten. During those two years, the town was so often on the point of being taken, occupied so many times by the French and by the enemy; so many foreigners came thither, so many country people took refuge within the walls, the interests of so many persons were compromised, so many lives endangered, there was so much excitement and misery, that everyone could think only of himself.

Abbé de Solis and his nephew and the two brothers Pierquin being the only persons who visited Madame Claes, the winter of 1814-15 was to her the most painful of death-agonies. Her husband rarely came to see her. To be sure, he remained with her several hours after dinner; but, as she no longer had the strength to sustain a long conversation, he

would utter one or two sentences that were always the same, then he would sit down and hold his peace, and a horrible silence would reign in the parlor. The monotony was relieved somewhat when Abbé de Solis and his nephew passed the evening at Claes House. While the old abbé played backgammon with Balthazar, Marguerite talked with Emmanuel by her mother's bedside, and Joséphine smiled upon their innocent happiness, never betraying by a sign how painful and at the same time how refreshing to her bruised heart was the fresh breeze of those virginal loves overflowing in waves at every word. The tone of voice which charmed those two children broke her heart, a glance of mutual understanding which she surprised as it passed between them, brought back to her mind, on her death-bed, memories of the hours of her happy youth which intensified the bitterness of the present. Emmanuel and Marguerite had a delicacy of feeling which caused them to restrain the charming child's play of love, in order not to hurt a suffering woman whose wounds were instinctively divined by them.

No one has ever as yet remarked that the sentiments have a life of their own, a nature derived from the circumstances amid which they were born; they retain the features of the places where they grow to maturity, and the stamp of the ideas which influenced their development. There are passions ardently conceived which retain their ardor, like Madame Claes's passion for her husband; then there are sentiments upon which everything has smiled,

which retain the joyous activity of the early morning, their harvests of joy are never unaccompanied by laughter and fêtes; but there are also passions fatally encompassed by melancholy or begirt by misfortune, passions whose pleasures are painful, costly, beset with dread, poisoned by remorse, or overflowing with despair. The love buried in the hearts of Emmanuel and Marguerite, although neither of them understood as yet that love was involved in their relations—that sentiment that bloomed beneath the sombre arched ceiling of the Claes gallery, in the presence of a stern old abbé, in a moment of silence and tranquillity; that love, serious and reserved, but abounding in delicate attentions, in secret joys as sweet as grapes stolen in the corner of a vineyard, retained the brown and gray tints which colored it in the first hours of its existence. Afraid to indulge in any outspoken demonstration beside that bed of pain, those two children magnified their enjoyment, unknown to themselves, by a concentration which stamped it in the inmost recesses of their hearts. There were loving attentions to the invalid, in which Emmanuel delighted to share, happy in the opportunity to unite himself more closely to Marguerite by making himself, in anticipation, a son of that mother. A melancholy word of thanks replaced on the girl's lips the honeyed language of lovers. The sighs of their hearts, filled with joy by the glances they exchanged, were hardly to be distinguished from the sighs extorted by the spectacle of their mother's suffering. Their brief, happy moments of

indirect avowals, of unfinished promises, of repressed outpourings of the heart, might be compared to the allegories painted by Raphael on dark backgrounds. They both had a certainty which they did not acknowledge to themselves; they knew that the sun was shining above them, but they did not know what wind would drive away the heavy black clouds massed over their heads; they were doubtful of the future, and, fearing that they were destined to be always side by side with suffering, they remained timidly in the shadow of that twilight, not daring to say to each other: "Shall we finish the day together?" Nevertheless, by the affection which Madame Claes displayed for her children, she nobly concealed all those causes of anxiety as to which she imposed silence upon herself. Her children caused her neither apprehension nor terror, they were her consolation, but they were not her life; she was living for them, she was dying for Balthazar.

Painful as was the presence of her husband, who sat wrapt in thought for hours together, and from time to time glanced listlessly at her, those cruel moments were the only time when she forgot her suffering. Balthazar's indifference to that dying woman would have seemed criminal to any stranger who had chanced to witness it; but Madame Claes and her daughters were accustomed to it, they were acquainted with his heart, and they absolved him. If, during the day, Madame Claes suddenly became worse, if she passed through a dangerous crisis, if she seemed to be at the point of death, Balthazar

was the only person in the house or in the town who did not know it; Lemulquinier, his valet, knew it; but neither his daughters, upon whom their mother enjoined silence, nor his wife informed him of the perilous condition of a creature whom he once loved so fervently. When his footsteps echoed through the gallery as he came down to dinner, Madame Claes was happy: she was going to see him, and she summoned all her strength that she might enjoy that blessing to the full. As he entered the room, that pallid, half-dead creature would flush vividly and recover a semblance of health; the scientist would come to her bedside, take her hand, and see her in a false guise; to him only she seemed well. When he asked: "My dear wife, how are you today?" she would reply: "Better, my dear!" and make that preoccupied man believe that she would be up and about the next day, fully restored to health. Balthazar's abstraction was so complete that he considered the disease of which his wife was dying a simple indisposition. Moribund to everybody else, she was full of life in his eyes.

A complete separation between the husband and the wife was the result of that year. Claes slept apart, rose early, and shut himself up in his laboratory or in his study; as he no longer saw her except in the presence of her daughters or of the two or three friends who visited her, he became weaned from her. Those two, who were formerly in the habit of thinking in common, now had, and then at long intervals, only those moments of communion, of unconstraint,

of expansion, which constitute the life of the heart, and there came a time when even those rare joys ceased. Physical suffering came to the assistance of that poor woman and helped her to endure a void, a separation, which would have killed her if she had been fully alive. She suffered such intense pain, that sometimes she was happy in the thought that he whom she still loved was not a witness of it. She could gaze at Balthazar during a part of the evening, and, knowing that he was happy in his own way, she espoused the happiness that she had procured for him. That frail enjoyment was enough for her, she no longer asked herself whether he loved her, she struggled to believe that he did, and glided over that layer of ice, afraid to bear heavily upon it, lest she should break it and drown her heart in a horrible void. As nothing occurred to disturb that tranquillity, and as the disease which was slowly consuming Madame Claes contributed to the peace of the household, maintaining the conjugal affection in a passive condition, the early days of the year 1816 arrived without a shock and found the family in the depressing state we have described.

One day, late in February, Pierquin the notary dealt the blow which was destined to hurry into the grave an angelic woman, whose soul, so said Abbé de Solis, was almost without sin.

“Madame,” he whispered in her ear, seizing a moment when her daughters could not hear what he said, “Monsieur Claes has instructed me to borrow three hundred thousand francs on his estates;

you must take steps to protect your children's fortune."

Madame Claes clasped her hands, looked up at the ceiling, and thanked the notary with a kindly inclination of the head and a sad smile, by which he was deeply touched. That sentence was a dagger-thrust which killed Pépita. During that day, she was absorbed in painful reflections which swelled her heart almost to bursting, and she was in a plight similar to that of the traveller who steps on a small stone, loses his equilibrium, and rolls to the bottom of the precipice along whose edge he has been feeling his way bravely for a long while.

When the notary had gone, Madame Claes bade Marguerite bring her writing materials, collected her strength, and devoted herself for some moments to the task of writing a testamentary letter. She paused several times to gaze at her daughter. The hour for confessions had come. Marguerite, while managing the house during her mother's illness, had so completely fulfilled the dying woman's hopes, that Madame Claes looked forward to the future of her family without despair, seeming to see herself living again in that brave-hearted and loving angel. Doubtless the two women felt that they had mutual and painful confidences to make to each other, for the daughter looked at the mother the instant that her mother looked at her, and both had tears in their eyes. Several times, when Madame Claes paused to rest, Marguerite said: "Mother?—" as if she were about to speak; then she stopped, as if suffocated,

and her mother, too much engrossed by her own thoughts, asked for an explanation of the question. At last, Madame Claes was ready to seal her letter; Marguerite, who was holding a candle for her, discreetly withdrew in order not to see the superscription.

“You may read it, my child!” said the invalid, in a heart-rending tone.

Marguerite saw that her mother wrote the words: “For my daughter Marguerite.”

“We will talk when I have rested,” she added, placing the letter under her bolster.

Then she fell back on her pillow, as if exhausted by the effort she had made, and slept for several hours. When she awoke, both her daughters and both her sons were kneeling by her bed and praying fervently. It was Thursday. Gabriel and Jean had come from their school in charge of Emmanuel de Solis, who had been appointed professor of history and philosophy six months before.

“Dear children, we must say adieu!” she cried. “You do not abandon me! and he whom—”

She did not finish.

“Monsieur Emmanuel,” said Marguerite, seeing the color fade from her mother’s cheeks, “go and tell father that mamma is worse.”

Young Solis went up to the laboratory, and induced Lemulquinier to tell Balthazar to come and speak to him; and he said in reply to the young man’s urgent summons:

“I will come.”

“My friend,” said Madame Claes to Emmanuel, when he returned, “take my two boys and go and find your uncle. It is time, I think, for me to receive the last sacraments, and I would like to receive them at his hands.”

When she was alone with her daughters, she made a sign to Marguerite, who, understanding her wishes, sent Félicie away.

“I have something to say to you, too, mamma,” said Marguerite, who, not realizing how ill her mother was, inflamed the wound inflicted by Pierquin. “For ten days I have had no money for the household expenses, and I owe the servants six months’ wages. Twice I have tried to ask father for money and I have not dared. You don’t know what he has done! the pictures in the gallery and the wine in the cellar have been sold.”

“He never said a word to me of all that!” cried Madame Claes. “O God! thou dost call me home in time.—My poor children, what will become of you?”

She prayed earnestly, and her eyes gleamed with the flames of repentance.

“Marguerite,” she continued, taking the letter from under her bolster, “here is a letter which you are not to open and read unless, after my death, you are in the greatest distress, that is to say, unless you lack bread to eat in this house. My darling Marguerite, love your father dearly, but take care of your sister and brothers. In a few days, in a few hours, perhaps, you will be at the head of

the house! Be economical. If you should find yourself in opposition to your father's wishes,—and that may happen, since he has spent large sums in pursuit of a secret, the discovery of which is likely to bring him great renown and wealth, and he will doubtless need more money and will perhaps ask you for it,—in that case, display all a daughter's affection and find a way to reconcile the interests of which you will be the only protector with what you owe to a father, to a great man who sacrifices his happiness, his life, to the glory of his family; he could not do wrong except in appearance, his purposes will always be noble, he is such a dear, good man, and his heart is full of love; you will live to see him kindly and affectionate once more! I have felt bound to say thus much to you on the brink of the grave, Marguerite. If you wish to soothe the agony of my death, my child, you will promise to take my place with your father and never to cause him any unhappiness; do not reproach him, do not judge him! In a word, be a gentle and willing mediator until such time as his work is finished and he resumes his position as the head of his family."

"I understand you, dear mother," said Marguerite, kissing the dying woman's inflamed eyes, "and I will do as you wish."

"Do not marry, my angel," continued Madame Claes, "until Gabriel is able to succeed you in the management of the household affairs. Your husband, if you should marry, might not share your

feelings, might bring discord into the family and torment your father.”

Marguerite looked in her mother’s face, and said:

“Have you nothing else to say to me about my marriage?”

“Can it be that you hesitate?” said the dying woman in dismay.

“No,” was the reply, “I promise to obey you.”

“Poor child, I could not make up my mind to sacrifice myself for you,” added the mother, shedding hot tears, “and I ask you to sacrifice yourself for all! Happiness makes one selfish. Yes, Marguerite, I have been weak because I was happy. Be strong, retain your good sense for the benefit of those who have none. Act so that your brothers and your sister will never blame me. Love your father dearly, but do not vex him—too much.”

She threw her head back upon her pillow, and said no more: her strength had abandoned her. The internal conflict between the wife and the mother had been too fierce.

A few moments later, the clergy arrived, preceded by Abbé de Solis, and the parlor was filled with the servants. When the ceremony began, Madame Claes, whom her confessor aroused from her lethargy, looked at all those who stood about her and did not see Balthazar.

“And monsieur?” she said.

That question, in which the whole story of her life and death was told, was uttered in such a pitiful tone that it caused a painful thrill throughout the

assemblage. Despite her great age, Martha darted away like an arrow, ran upstairs, and knocked loudly on the laboratory door.

"Monsieur, madame is dying, and they are waiting for you before administering the sacraments," she cried, with the vehemence of indignation.

"I am coming down," Balthazar replied.

Lemulquinier appeared a moment later, saying that his master would follow him. Madame Claes did not remove her gaze from the parlor door; but her husband did not appear until just as the ceremony was at an end. Abbé de Solis and the children stood around the dying woman's pillow. When she saw her husband enter the room, Joséphine's face flushed, and a tear or two rolled down her cheeks.

"*Doubtless you were just on the point of decomposing nitrogen?*" she said, with an angelic sweetness which made all those who heard her shudder.

"It is done!" he cried, joyfully. "Nitrogen contains oxygen, and a substance of an imponderable nature which is probably the active principle of—"

He was interrupted by a horror-stricken murmur which restored his presence of mind.

"What did they tell me?" he continued. "Are you worse? What has happened?"

"It happens, monsieur," said the wrathful Abbé de Solis in his ear, "that your wife is dying, and you have killed her!"

Without awaiting a reply, Abbé de Solis took his nephew's arm and left the room, followed by the children, who attended him as far as the courtyard.

Balthazar was as one struck by lightning, and stood staring at his wife, while tears fell from his eyes.

“You are dying, and I have killed you!” he cried. “What can he possibly mean?”

“My dear,” she replied, “I lived only through your love, and you have unwittingly taken my life from me.”

“Leave us,” said Claes to his children, when they returned to the room.—“Have I ceased to love you for a single instant?” he continued, sitting by his wife’s pillow, and taking her hands and kissing them.

“My dear, I shall not reproach you. You have made me happy, too happy; I could not endure the contrast between the early days of our married life, which were full to overflowing, and these last days, during which you have not been yourself, and which have been empty. Life of the heart, like physical life, has its phases. For six years past, you have been dead to your love, to your family, to everything that made our happiness. I will not mention the joys which are the portion of youth, for they naturally cease in the autumn of life; but they leave fruits upon which hearts feed, a boundless confidence, pleasant customs; and you have snatched from me those treasures of our time of life. It is time for me to go: we are not living together in any sense, you conceal your thoughts and your acts from me. How does it happen that you have come to fear me? Have I ever addressed a word, a glance, a gesture to you, in which there was a suggestion of

reproach? And yet you have sold your last pictures, you have sold the very wine in your cellar, and you are borrowing again on your property without saying a word to me!—Ah! I shall turn my back upon life, disgusted with life. If you commit errors, if you blind your eyes to the fact that you are pursuing the impossible, have not I shown you that there was so much love in my heart that it was sweet to me to share your errors, to walk always by your side even though you should lead me into the paths of crime? You have loved me too well; that is my glory and that my sorrow. My illness has lasted a long while, Balthazar; it began on the day when, in this room where I am about to die, you proved to me that you belonged to science rather than to your family. Your wife is dead, and your fortune squandered. Your fortune and your wife were your property, you could dispose of them as you thought best; but, when I am no more, my fortune will be my children's, and you will not be able to touch it. Then what will become of you? I owe you the truth now, the dying see a long way! hereafter what will be the counterpoise to the accursed passion which you have made your life? If you have sacrificed me to it, your children will be a trifling obstacle in your path, for I must do you the justice to say that you preferred me to all others. Two millions and six years of toil have been thrown into that gulf, and you have found nothing."

At that, Claes put his prematurely white head in his hands and hid his face.

“And you will find nothing except shame for yourself, destitution for your children,” continued the dying woman. “Already people call you in derision ‘Claes the alchemist;’ later, it will be ‘Claes the fool!’ For my part, I believe in you. I know that you are great, learned, full of genius; but in the eyes of the vulgar, genius is akin to folly. Glory is the sun of the dead; while you live, you will be unhappy, like all great men, and you will ruin your children. I am going from you without having ever enjoyed your renown, which would have consoled me for the loss of happiness. Dear Balthazar, to make my death less bitter, it was necessary that I should be certain that our children will have a crust of bread; but nothing, not even you, could allay my anxiety—”

“I swear,” said Claes, “to—”

“Do not swear, my dear, so that you need not break your oath,” she said, interrupting him. “You owed us your protection, we have been without it nearly seven years. Science is your life. A great man can have neither wife nor children. Walk alone in your paths of poverty! Your virtues are not those of common men, you belong to the world, you cannot belong to a wife or a family. You drain the soil around you as great trees do! I, a poor, feeble plant, could not rise high enough, I expire half-way up your life. I waited until this last day to tell you of these ghastly thoughts, which I discovered only by the lightning-flashes of grief and despair. Spare my children! May these words echo in your heart! I

will repeat them until I draw my last breath. The wife is dead, you see! you have stripped her little by little of her feelings, of her pleasures. Alas! except for that cruel service, which you have rendered me involuntarily, should I have lived so long? But these poor children did not abandon me, they have grown up in presence of my sufferings, and the mother has survived. Spare, spare our children!"

"Lemulquinier!" exclaimed Balthazar in a voice of thunder.

The old valet instantly appeared.

"Go and destroy everything upstairs, machines, apparatus; do it carefully, but smash everything.—I abandon science!" he said to his wife.

"It is too late!" she rejoined, with a glance at Lemulquinier.—"Marguerite!" she cried out, feeling that she was dying.

Marguerite appeared in the doorway, and uttered a piercing shriek when she saw her mother's dimmed eyes.

"Marguerite!" the dying woman repeated.

That last exclamation contained such a vehement appeal to her daughter, seemed to invest her with such full authority, that it was a whole testament in itself. The terrified family hurried to the parlor, and saw Madame Claes breathe her last, having expended her last vital force in her conversation with her husband. Balthazar and Marguerite, standing, one at the foot, the other at the head of the bed, could not believe that she was really dead; her virtues and inexhaustible affection were known to

them alone. The father and the daughter exchanged a glance heavy with thoughts; the daughter was passing judgment on her father, the father was trembling already lest he should find in his daughter an instrument of vengeance. Although memories of the love with which his wife had filled his life besieged his mind in throngs, and gave to the dead woman's last words a sanctified authority which would make him always hear their tones, Balthazar doubted his heart, always too weak against his genius; then, too, he heard a terrible rumbling of passion which denied him the strength of his repentance and made him afraid of himself.

When that woman had vanished, everyone realized that Claes House had had a soul and that that soul was no more. The grief of the family was so keen that the parlor where the noble-hearted Joséphine seemed to live again, remained closed; no one had the courage to enter it.



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Society practises none of the virtues it demands from men; it commits crimes every hour, but it commits them in words; it leads up to evil acts by jesting, as it belittles the beautiful by ridicule; it makes sport of sons who mourn their fathers overmuch, it anathematizes those who do not mourn them enough; and it amuses itself by weighing dead bodies before they are cold!—On the evening of the day on which Madame Claes breathed her last, her friends tossed a few flowers on her grave between two games of whist, and did homage to her good qualities as they looked for a heart or a club. Then, after a few tearful phrases, which are the *Ba, be, bi, bo, bu* of collective grief, and which are pronounced with the same intonations, with neither more nor less sentiment in every town in France, at every hour in the day, one and all made estimates as to the amount of the inheritance. Pierquin was the first to call the attention of those who were discussing the event to the fact that that woman's death was a blessing to her: her husband made her too unhappy; but that it was a still greater blessing to her children; she would never have had the heart to refuse to turn over her fortune to her husband, whom she adored; whereas, now, Claes could not touch it. And everyone made an estimate of poor Madame Claes's property, reckoned up her savings,—had she or had she not saved

anything?—appraised her jewels, exposed her wardrobe, searched her bureau drawers, while the afflicted family wept and prayed around the death-bed.

With the keen glance of a sworn appraiser of fortunes, Pierquin reckoned that Madame Claes's separate property, to use his expression, could be followed, and should amount to something like fifteen hundred thousand francs, consisting of the forest of Waignies, the wood having increased enormously in value in twelve years—and he counted large trees and small, old and new growth;—and of her interest in Balthazar's property, which could be made to contribute to the reimbursement of her children, if the surplus of the liquidation should prove insufficient. Thus Mademoiselle Claes was, to use another of his expressions, "a four-hundred-thousand-franc girl."

"But if she doesn't marry soon," he added, "which would emancipate her and enable her to sell the forest of Waignies, turn the shares of the minor children into money and invest it so that their father cannot touch it, Monsieur Claes is just the man to ruin his children."

Everyone looked about to see what young men there were in the province fitted to aspire to Mademoiselle Claes's hand, but no one paid the notary the compliment of assuming that he was worthy of her. The notary found some reason for rejecting each one of the possible *partis* suggested, as unworthy of Marguerite. His interlocutors looked at one another and smiled, and took pleasure in prolonging that bit of provincial malice. Pierquin had

seen in Madame Claes's death an event favorable to his pretensions, and he was already dissecting the corpse for his own advantage.

"That excellent woman," he said to himself, as he went home to bed, "was proud as a peacock, and would never have given her daughter to me. Ha! ha! why shouldn't I play my cards now so as to marry her? Père Claes is drunk with carbon and doesn't care what becomes of his children; if I ask him for his daughter after I have convinced Marguerite how urgently necessary it is for her to marry in order to save the fortunes of her brothers and her sister, he will be glad enough to get rid of a child who may be a thorn in his flesh."

He fell asleep dreaming of the charms of the matrimonial contract, and meditating upon the possible advantages to himself in the affair and the guaranty of his happiness which he found in the personal charms of the person whom he proposed to marry. It would be hard to find in the province a young woman of more refined beauty and of more perfect breeding than Marguerite. Her modesty and her grace might be compared to those of the pretty flower which Emmanuel dared not name before her, fearing to disclose the secret aspirations of his heart. Her sentiments were dignified, her principles truly religious, she would surely be a chaste wife; but she not only flattered the vanity which guides every man more or less in the choice of a wife,—she also gratified the notary's pride by virtue of the very great consideration in which her family, noble on

both sides, was held in Flanders, and which her husband would share.

The next morning, Pierquin took several thousand-franc notes from his strong-box, and amicably offered them to Balthazar, in order to spare him the annoyance of pecuniary embarrassment at a time when he was overwhelmed with grief. Touched by that delicate attention, Balthazar would undoubtedly speak to his daughter in eulogistic terms of the notary's kind heart and personal attractions. He did nothing of the sort. To Monsieur Claes and his daughter it seemed the simplest act imaginable, and their suffering was too absorbing to allow them to think of Pierquin. Indeed, Balthazar's despair was so overwhelming that those persons who were disposed to blame his conduct forgave him, not so much on the ground of his scientific mania, which might be considered an excuse, as of his regrets, which could not undo the harm he had done. Society contents itself with grimaces, it takes its pay for what it gives, without verifying the alloy; in its eyes, genuine grief is a spectacle, a sort of entertainment which disposes it to give absolution to everyone, even a criminal; in its hunger for excitement, it acquits without discrimination both the man who makes it laugh and the man who makes it weep, without calling upon them to explain their methods.

Marguerite had completed her nineteenth year when her father turned over to her the management of the house, where her authority was piously recognized by her sister and brothers, whom Madame

Claes, in her last moments, had enjoined to obey their older sister. Her mourning heightened the bloom of her fair complexion, just as melancholy brought out in bold relief her patience and her gentleness. From the very beginning, she gave abundant proof of that womanly courage, that never-failing serenity, which must be attributes of the angels whose duty it is to spread peace abroad, touching suffering hearts with their green palm-branch.

But, although she accustomed herself by a premature comprehension of her duties to conceal her grief, it was none the less keen; her placid exterior was not in accord with the depth of her sensations; and she was destined to become acquainted early in life with those terrible revulsions of feeling which the heart is not always strong enough to restrain; to be kept constantly confined by her father between the generous impulses natural to youthful hearts and the imperious voice of necessity. The planning and reckoning which took possession of her mind on the day after her mother's death forced her to contend with the material interests of life at an age when girls have no conception of aught save its pleasures. A ghastly education in suffering which angelic natures can never avoid!

The love that is based on money and vanity is the most self-willed of passions. Pierquin did not choose to delay the execution of his designs on the heiress. A few days after the assumption of mourning, he sought an opportunity to speak to Marguerite, and began operations with an adroitness which might

well have deluded her; but love had implanted in her heart a keenness of vision which prevented her falling a victim to appearances, which were the better adapted to sentimental deception in that Pierquin, on that occasion, exhibited the kindliness peculiar to his profession, the kindliness of the notary who thinks that he is in love when he is saving five-franc pieces. Relying upon his uncertain relationship, upon his familiarity with the business and the secrets of that family, sure of the esteem and friendship of the father, well served by the heedlessness of a scientist who had no preconceived plan of his daughter's future, and having no idea that Marguerite had already formed an attachment, he allowed her to see the real nature of a suit which made no pretence of passion apart from the alliance of schemes of the sort which are most hateful to young hearts, and which he did not know how to conceal. He was the one who artlessly displayed his sentiments while she resorted to dissimulation, precisely because he thought that he was acting against a defenceless girl, and underrated the privileges of weakness.

“My dear cousin,” he said to Marguerite, as they were walking along the paths in the little garden, “you know my heart, and you know that my inclination is to respect the painful emotion from which you are suffering at this moment. My heart is too sensitive for a notary, I live only through the heart, and I am obliged to give my attention all the time to the interests of others when I would like to

abandon myself to the pleasant emotions which make life happy. So that it pains me deeply to be obliged to speak to you upon subjects not in accord with the state of your mind; but I must. I have thought of you, and of you alone, for several days. I have become convinced that, by a strange fatality, the fortune of your brothers and your sister, and your own fortune too, are in danger. Do you wish to save your family from utter ruin?"

"What must I do?" she asked, half frightened by his words.

"Marry," replied Pierquin.

"I will not marry!" she cried.

"You will marry," rejoined the notary, "when you have duly reflected upon the critical situation in which you now are."

"How can my marriage save—?"

"That is what I expected you to ask, cousin," he said, interrupting her. "Marriage is emancipation!"

"Why should I be emancipated?" queried Marguerite.

"To put you in possession of your property, my dear little cousin," replied the notary, triumphantly. "When you are married, you are entitled to your distributive share in your mother's property. In order to give it to you, it must be turned into money; now, in order to turn it into money, the forest of Waignies must be sold, must it not? That being done, the whole property will be capitalized, and your father, as guardian, will be required to invest

the shares of your brothers and sister so that chemistry cannot touch it."

"And in the contrary event, what would happen?" she asked.

"Why," said the notary, "your father will have the management of your property. If he should begin again to try to make gold, he could sell the forest of Waignies and leave you all as naked as little Saint-Johns. At this moment, the forest is worth nearly fourteen hundred thousand francs; but let your father cut every stick of wood to-day or to-morrow, and your thirteen hundred acres won't be worth three hundred thousand. Isn't it better to avoid that almost certain danger by making the partition inevitable to-day by your emancipation? In that way you will save all the wood in the forest, which your father might dispose of later to your injury. At this moment, while his chemistry is asleep, he will necessarily invest the proceeds of the sale in the public funds. They are selling at fifty-nine, so that the dear children will obtain an income of nearly five thousand francs from fifty thousand; and as property belonging to minors cannot be sold, your brothers and your sister will find their fortunes doubled when they come of age. Whereas, otherwise, bless my soul— You see how it is. Moreover, your father has made a hole in your mother's property; we shall find out what the deficit is by an inventory. If he is indebted to the estate, you can take a mortgage on his property and save something."

“Fie!” said Marguerite, “that would be an insult to my father. My mother’s last words were not spoken so long since that I cannot remember them. My father is incapable of robbing his children,” she added, shedding tears of distress. “You do not know him, Monsieur Pierquin.”

“But if your father goes back to his chemistry, my dear cousin, he—”

“We shall be ruined, you say?”

“Oh! yes, utterly ruined! Believe me, Marguerite,” he said, taking her hand and placing it upon his heart, “I should be false to my duty if I did not insist. Your interest alone—”

“Monsieur,” rejoined Marguerite, coldly, withdrawing her hand, “the interest of my family, which I thoroughly understand, demands that I do not marry. My mother was of that opinion.”

“Cousin,” he cried, with the earnestness of a man whose mind is engrossed with money and who sees a fortune vanishing, “you are committing suicide, you are throwing your mother’s inheritance overboard. Very well! I will prove the devotion that results from my extreme affection for you! You do not know how dearly I love you! I have adored you ever since I saw you at the last ball your father gave! you were enchanting. You can trust to the voice of the heart when it talks of financial interests, my dear Marguerite.”

He paused.

“Yes, we will summon a family council and emancipate you without consulting you.”

“But what does it mean to be emancipated?”

“To enjoy your rights.”

“If I can be emancipated without being married, why do you want me to marry?—and whom?”

Pierquin tried to bestow a tender glance on his cousin, but that expression was in such striking contrast to the rigidity of his eyes, accustomed as they were to speak of money, that Marguerite fancied that she could detect selfish scheming in that improvised affection.

“You should marry the man who is most attractive to you—in the town,” he rejoined. “A husband is indispensable to you, even as a matter of business. You are about to have to deal with your father. Can you resist him, single-handed?”

“Oh! monsieur, I shall find a way to defend my sister and my brothers when the time comes.”

“Plague on it, the chatterbox!” said Pierquin to himself.—“No, you could not resist him,” he added, aloud.

“Let us change the subject,” she said.

“Adieu, cousin. I shall try to serve you in spite of yourself, and I will prove how well I love you by protecting you, whether you will or not, against a disaster that everybody in the town anticipates.”

“I thank you for the interest you take in me, but I beg you not to suggest or undertake anything that can cause my father the slightest annoyance.”

Marguerite remained deep in thought as Pierquin retired; she compared his metallic voice, his manners which had no more flexibility than steel springs,

his glances which expressed servility rather than gentleness, with the melodiously mute poesy in which Emmanuel's sentiments were clothed. Whatever we may say or do, there is a marvellous magnetism whose effects never deceive. The tone of the voice, the glance, the impassioned gestures of the man who loves may be imitated, a maiden may be deceived by a clever actor; but, in order to succeed, he must be the only one. If that maiden has by her side a heart that beats in unison with hers, she speedily recognizes the methods of expression of the genuine passion. At that moment, Emmanuel, like Marguerite, was under the influence of the clouds which, ever since their first meeting, had, with the persistency of fate, formed a lowering atmosphere above their heads and deprived them of the sight of love's blue sky. He had that idolatrous fondness for the elect of his heart, which absence of hope renders so sweet and so mysterious in its devout manifestations. Being placed far below Mademoiselle Claes socially, by reason of his lack of means, and having only an honorable name to offer her, he saw no probability of being accepted as her husband. He had waited patiently for some encouragement, which Marguerite had refused to give him under the fainting eyes of a dying woman. Therefore, being equally pure, they had not exchanged a single word of love. Their joys had been the selfish joys which the unfortunate are forced to enjoy alone. They had thrilled with emotion apart, although they were inflamed by a gleam cast by the same hope; they seemed to be

afraid of themselves, feeling that they were already too closely united. Thus Emmanuel trembled when he touched the hand of the sovereign to whom he had dedicated a sanctuary in his heart. The most unthinking contact would have developed a too violent passion in him, he would have lost control of his unchained senses. But although they had accorded each other none of the slight yet significant, the innocent yet momentous, manifestations in which the most timid lovers indulge, they were, nevertheless, so firmly installed in each other's hearts, that they both knew that they were equally ready to make the greatest sacrifices for each other, that being the only pleasure they could enjoy.

After Madame Claes's death, their unavowed love was stifled beneath the mourning garments. The hues of the sphere in which they lived had changed from brown to black, and the rays of light were dimmed by tears. Marguerite's reserve changed to something very like coldness, for she had to keep the oath exacted by her mother, and, although she was really more at liberty than before, she became more rigid. Emmanuel had espoused the grief of his beloved, realizing that the slightest word of love, the slightest attempt to press his suit, would be a breach of the laws of the heart. Thus that great love was more closely hidden than it had ever been. Those two loving hearts still gave forth the same note; but, being separated by grief as they had been by the timidities of youth and by the respect due to the sufferings of her who was now no more, they

still restricted themselves to the wonderful language of the eyes, to the silent eloquence of acts of mutual devotion, to a constant uniformity of thought, sublime harmonies of youth, the first steps of love in its infancy. Emmanuel came every morning to inquire for Claes and Marguerite; but he did not get as far as the dining-room unless he brought a letter from Gabriel, or Balthazar requested him to come in. His first glance at the girl expressed a thousand sympathetic thoughts: that he suffered because of the reserve imposed upon him by the proprieties, that his mind had not left her, that he shared her sadness; in a word, he sprinkled the dew of his tears on the heart of his loved one with a glance poisoned by no ulterior motive. That excellent young man lived so entirely in the present, he clung so earnestly to a joy which he believed to be fleeting, that Marguerite sometimes reproached herself for not generously offering him her hand and saying to him: "Let us be friends!"

Pierquin continued his assaults with the obstinacy which is the unreflecting patience of fools. He judged Marguerite according to the rules ordinarily employed by most men in judging the character of women. He supposed that the words marriage, liberty, fortune, which he had tossed into her ear, would take root in her mind and would cause to bloom there a desire of which he might take advantage, and he fancied that her coldness was dissimulation. But, although he encompassed her with polite attentions, he was unsuccessful in dissembling the

despotic manners of a man accustomed to solve the most momentous questions in the lives of families. To console her, he favored her with the common-places familiar to men of his profession, who crawl like snails over human sorrows and leave a trail of hollow words which detract from their sanctity. His tenderness was mere wheedling. He laid aside his assumed melancholy at the outer door when he put on his overshoes or took his umbrella. He made use of the tone which his long intimacy with the family authorized him to adopt, as an instrument to improve his position in their midst and to persuade Marguerite to consent to a marriage already decided upon by the whole town. Thus the true, devoted, respectful love formed a striking contrast to that selfish, scheming love. In each of the two men everything was homogeneous. One feigned a passion, and availed himself of every possible advantage in order to gain his end and marry Marguerite; the other concealed his love, and feared to let his devotion appear.

Some little time after her mother's death, Marguerite had an opportunity to compare, on the same day, the only two men whom she was in a position to judge. Until that time, the solitude to which she was condemned by the laws of society had made her unapproachable by any persons who might think of becoming suitors for her hand. One day, after breakfast,—it was one of the loveliest mornings in April,—Emmanuel called just as Monsieur Claes was going out. It was so hard for Balthazar to

endure the desolate aspect of his house, that he was in the habit of walking on the ramparts during a part of every day. Emmanuel's first impulse was to accompany him; he hesitated, seemed to draw upon a reserve stock of courage, looked at Marguerite, and remained. Marguerite guessed that the professor wished to speak to her, and suggested to him that they go into the garden. She sent Félicie to Martha, who was sewing in the sitting-room on the first floor; then she seated herself on a bench where her sister and the old duenna could see her.

"Monsieur Claes is as completely absorbed by his sorrow as he was by his scientific investigations," said the young man, watching Balthazar walk slowly across the courtyard. "Everybody in town is sorry for him; he walks like a man who has no control of his thoughts; he stops for no reason, looks without seeing."

"Every sorrow has its own mode of expression," said Marguerite, restraining her tears. "What do you wish to say to me?" she continued, after a pause, with a cold and dignified air.

"Mademoiselle," rejoined Emmanuel in a voice trembling with emotion, "have I any right to speak to you as I am about to do? Think, I beg you, that I but wish to be of service to you, and allow me to believe that a teacher may be so interested in the fate of his pupils as to be anxious concerning their future. Your brother Gabriel is more than fifteen years old, he is in the second class, and it certainly is necessary to arrange his studies with a

view to the career he is to follow. Monsieur your father is the one to decide that question; but, if he should not think of it, would it not be unfortunate for Gabriel? would it not, on the other hand, be very mortifying to monsieur your father if you should remind him that he is neglecting his son? In this dilemma, would it not be well for you to consult your brother as to his inclinations, to help him to choose a career for himself, so that if, later, his father should choose to make him a magistrate, a government official, a soldier, Gabriel would already have some special knowledge? I do not think that either you or Monsieur Claes would wish him to be idle."

"Oh! no," said Marguerite, "I thank you, Monsieur Emmanuel, you are right. My mother, when she had us learn lacemaking, and took such pains to teach us to draw and sew and embroider, and play the piano, used often to say to us that no one knew what might happen in life. Gabriel must have a thorough education and some special training. But what is the most suitable career for a man to follow?"

"Mademoiselle," said Emmanuel, tremulous with joy, "Gabriel has shown more aptitude for mathematics than any of his class; if he chose to enter the Ecole Polytechnique, I think that he could acquire knowledge there that would be useful in any career. On leaving there, he would still be at liberty to choose the one for which he felt the most inclination. You will have gained some time without

having prejudiced his future at all. Men who graduate from that school with honor are welcome everywhere. It has furnished administrators, diplomatists, scientists, engineers, generals, sailors, magistrates, manufacturers, and bankers. So there is nothing strange, then, in a young man of great wealth or of good family working with a view of being admitted there. If Gabriel should decide to do it, I would like to ask you—would you let me? Say yes!”

“What do you mean?”

“To be his private tutor,” he replied, trembling.

Marguerite looked in his face, took his hand, and said:

“Yes.”

She paused, then added in a tremulous voice:

“How fully I appreciate the delicacy which prompts you to offer the very thing that I can accept from you! From what you have just said, I can see that you have, indeed, thought of us. I thank you.”

Although she spoke with the utmost simplicity, Emmanuel turned away his head to conceal the tears which the joy of giving pleasure to Marguerite brought to his eyes.

“I will bring them both to you,” he said, when he recovered his calmness to some extent, “tomorrow is their holiday.”

He rose, and bowed to Marguerite, who followed him, and, when he was in the courtyard, he saw her still standing at the dining-room door, whence she made a friendly gesture of farewell.

After dinner, the notary came to call on Monsieur

Claes, and seated himself in the garden, between his cousin and Marguerite, on the very bench on which Emmanuel had sat.

“My dear cousin,” he said, “I came this evening to talk business. Forty-three days have passed since your wife’s demise.”

“I haven’t counted them,” said Balthazar, wiping away a tear called forth by the legal term *demise*.

“Oh! monsieur,” said Marguerite, looking at the notary, “how can you?”

“But, my cousin, we notaries are obliged to keep account of stated periods fixed by law. You and your co-heirs are the ones most deeply interested. Monsieur Claes has only minor children, he is required to return an inventory within the forty-five days following his wife’s demise, in order to establish the value of the property held in common. Of course, we must know whether it is favorable or not, in order that we may decide whether to accept it or to stand by the naked rights of minor children.”

Marguerite rose.

“Stay, cousin,” said Pierquin, “this is a matter that concerns you as well as your father. You know how fully I share your sorrow; but you must, none the less, give your attention to these details to-day; otherwise you may all find yourselves in a very bad plight! I am doing my duty as the family notary at this moment.”

“He is right,” said Claes.

“The time allowed expires in two days,” continued the notary; “I must proceed to-morrow,

therefore, to prepare the inventory, if for no other reason than to postpone the payment of the succession tax for which the treasury will soon call on you. The treasury has no heart, it doesn't disturb itself about sentiments, it fixes its claws in us at any and all times. So my clerk and I will come here every day, from ten to four, with the official appraiser, Monsieur Raparlier. As soon as we have finished in the town, we will go to the country house. As for the forest of Waignies, we will talk about that. Having settled that point, let us pass to another. We must convoke a family council to appoint a substitute guardian to watch over the interests of the minors. Monsieur Conyncks of Bruges is your nearest relative to-day, but he has become a Belgian! You ought to write to him on the subject, cousin; you can ascertain whether the goodman desires to settle in France, where he possesses some fine estates, and you can in that way persuade him to come with his daughter and settle in French Flanders. If he refuses, I will see about making up the council according to the degrees of relationship."

"What is the use of an inventory?" asked Marguerite.

"To determine the rights of the parties and the value of the property, assets and debts. When everything is appraised, the family council takes such steps as it deems advisable in the interest of the minor children."

"Pierquin," said Claes, rising from the bench, "proceed to prepare such documents as you deem

essential to preserve the rights of my children; but spare us the grief of witnessing the sale of what belonged to my dear—”

He did not finish, but he had spoken with so noble an air and in such a feeling tone that Marguerite took her father's hand and kissed it.

“Until to-morrow,” said Pierquin.

“Come to breakfast,” said Balthazar.

Then he seemed suddenly to remember, and cried:

“But by the terms of my marriage-contract, which was drawn according to the custom of Hainault, I released my wife from the obligation to return an inventory, so that she might not be pestered about it, and probably I am not bound to do it, either.”

“Ah! what bliss!” exclaimed Marguerite, “it would have caused us so much pain.”

“Very well, we will look over your contract to-morrow,” said the notary, somewhat confused.

“You are not familiar with it, then?” said Marguerite.

That query ended the interview. The notary was too embarrassed to continue, after his cousin's question.

“The devil's in it!” he said to himself in the courtyard. “That wool-gathering fellow finds his memory at the very moment when he needs it to prevent precaution being taken against him. His children will be stripped! that's as sure as that two and two make four. The idea of talking business to girls of nineteen who are given to sentiment! I have cudgelled my brains to save the property of

those children, by proceeding in regular form and coming to an understanding with goodman Conyncks.—And there you are! I have ruined myself in Marguerite's esteem, for she will ask her father why I wanted to make an inventory which she thinks is unnecessary. And Monsieur Claes will tell her that notaries have a mania for drawing documents, that we are notaries before we are kinsmen, cousins, or friends; in fact, he'll tell her all sorts of nonsense!"

He closed the door violently, cursing clients who ruin themselves through sentiment.

Balthazar was right. No inventory was returned. Nothing was settled, therefore, as to the father's position with reference to his children. Several months passed, bringing no change in the condition of affairs at Claes House. Gabriel, skilfully guided by Monsieur de Solis, who had become his tutor, applied himself diligently to learning the modern languages and preparing to pass the necessary examination for admission to the Ecole Polytechnique. Félicie and Marguerite had lived in absolute retirement, although, during the summer, they occupied their father's country house for economical reasons. Monsieur Claes attended to his affairs, paid his debts by borrowing a considerable sum on his property, and inspected the forest of Waignies. In the middle of the year 1817, his grief, gradually assuaged, left him alone and defenceless against the monotonous life he was leading, which weighed heavily upon him. At first, he

struggled bravely against the science, which was gradually waking to renewed life, and forbade himself to think of chemistry. Then he began to think of it. But he would not devote himself to it in practice, only in theory. That constant study inflamed his passion, which became argumentative. He discussed the question whether he had pledged himself not to continue his investigations, and remembered that his wife would not receive his oath. Although he had promised himself that he would pursue the solution of his problem no further, might he not change his mind when he could see triumph ahead? He was already fifty-nine. At that age, the idea which governed him acquired the dogged persistency with which monomanias begin. Circumstances also conspired against his wavering loyalty. The peace which then prevailed in Europe permitted the circulation of the scientific discoveries and theories advanced during the war by the scientific men of the different countries, between whom there had been no correspondence for nearly twenty years. Science had progressed, therefore. Claes found that progress in chemistry had tended, unknown to the chemists themselves, in the direction of the object of his investigations. Men who had devoted themselves to the higher problems of science believed as he did that light, heat, electricity, galvanism, and magnetism were different effects of one and the same cause, that the difference between the substances theretofore deemed simple must be produced by the varying proportions of some unknown principle. He feared

to learn that another had discovered the method of decomposing metals, and the constituent principle of electricity,—two discoveries which would lead to the solution of the chemical *Absolute*,—and this increased what the people of Douai called madness, and excited his longing to a pitch of frenzy which will be understood by persons passionately addicted to the sciences, or those who have known the tyranny of ideas. Thus Balthazar was soon borne away by a passion which had become more violent in proportion to the length of time it had slept.

Marguerite, who watched closely the mental phases through which her father was passing, opened the parlor. By using that as a living-room, she revived the painful memories caused by her mother's death, and actually succeeded, by dint of reawakening her father's regret, in postponing his plunge into the abyss into which he was destined to fall none the less. She insisted upon going into society, and forced Balthazar to divert his thoughts therein. Several available suitors presented themselves and kept Claes busy, although Marguerite declared that she would not marry until she had reached her twenty-fifth year.

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Notwithstanding his daughter's efforts, notwithstanding violent internal conflicts, Balthazar secretly resumed his labors early in the winter. It was difficult, however, to conceal such occupations from inquisitive women. One day, Martha said to Marguerite, as she was dressing her:

“Mademoiselle, we are lost! That monster of a Mulquinier, who's the devil in disguise, for I never saw him make the sign of the Cross, has gone up into the garret. Monsieur your father has embarked for hell! Heaven grant that he doesn't kill you as he killed poor, dear madame!”

“It is not possible,” said Marguerite.

“Come and see for yourself the proof of their traffic.”

Mademoiselle Claes ran to the window and saw a faint column of smoke issuing from the laboratory chimney.

“I shall be twenty-one in a few months,” she thought; “I will find a way to prevent the squandering of our fortune.”

In giving way to his passion, Balthazar proved that he had less respect for the interests of his children than he had had for his wife. The barriers were not so high, his conscience was more elastic, his passion became stronger. So he marched on in his career of glory, of toil, of hope, and of misery

with the frantic earnestness of a man convinced beyond the reach of argument. Sure of the result, he began to work night and day with a zeal which alarmed his daughters, who did not know how little harm is done by work which a man enjoys. As soon as her father renewed his experiments, Marguerite cut off all luxuries of the table, developed a parsimony worthy of a miser, and was admirably seconded by Martha and Josette. Claes paid no heed to that measure of reform, which reduced them to the strict necessities of life. In the first place, he ate no breakfast; secondly, he did not come down from his laboratory until the very moment that dinner was ready; and, lastly, he went to bed after sitting for a few hours with his two daughters, without saying a word to them. When he retired, they wished him good-night, and he submitted mechanically to be kissed on both cheeks. Such conduct would have caused the greatest domestic unhappiness had not Marguerite been prepared to exercise the authority of a mother, and fortified by a secret passion against the evils of such entire liberty. Pierquin had ceased to visit his cousins, feeling sure that they would soon be utterly ruined. Balthazar's estates in the country, which yielded a revenue of sixteen thousand francs and were worth about six hundred thousand, were already encumbered by mortgages to the amount of three hundred thousand. Before returning to his chemistry, Balthazar had effected a large loan. The income from the property was just enough to pay the interest;

but as, with the natural improvidence of men devoted to a single idea, he turned his rents over to Marguerite to defray the household expenses, the notary reckoned that three years would bring affairs to a crisis, and that the lawyers would devour what Balthazar had not already consumed. Marguerite's coldness had brought Pierquin to a state of indifference that was almost hostility. To justify himself in renouncing his suit for his cousin's hand if she became too poor, he said of the family, with a compassionate air:

“Those poor people are ruined! I did all that I could to save them; but what can you expect? Mademoiselle Claes refused to resort to any of the lawful expedients which would have kept them from poverty.”

Appointed principal of the college at Douai through his uncle's influence, Emmanuel, whose transcendent merits made him entirely worthy of that post, came every evening to see the two girls, who summoned the duenna to sit with them as soon as their father retired. It was never long before they heard young de Solis's gentle knock. He had become himself during the last three months, encouraged by the charming, unspoken gratitude with which Marguerite accepted his attentions. The rays from his soul, pure as a diamond, shone unclouded, and Marguerite was able to estimate their strength, their duration, when she saw how inexhaustible their source was. She admired the flowers as they bloomed one by one, after having inhaled their sweet

perfume in anticipation. Every day, Emmanuel realized some one of Marguerite's hopes, and caused new lights to glow in the enchanted regions of love,—lights which drove away the clouds, made their sky serene once more, and colored the fruitful treasures theretofore buried in darkness. Being more at his ease, Emmanuel was able to display the charms of his heart, until then modestly concealed: the overflowing light-heartedness of youth, the simplicity born of a life devoted to study, and the treasures of a refined mind which the world had not poisoned,—all the innocent gayety which goes so well with loving youth. His heart and Marguerite's understood each other better; they searched together the inmost recesses of their minds and found the same thoughts there: pearls of equal brilliancy, sweet and refreshing melodies like those which are heard under the sea and are said to fascinate divers! They became thoroughly acquainted with each other by that exchange of confidences, by that mutual curiosity, which in both of them assumed the most attractive forms of sentiment. It was all done without false shame, but not without coquetry on both sides.

The two hours which Emmanuel passed every evening with the two girls and Martha enabled Marguerite to endure the life of suffering and resignation upon which she had entered. That ingenuous, increasing love was her support. Emmanuel displayed in his demonstrations of affection that natural charm which is so seductive, that gentle,

refined mind which varies the monotony of sentiment, as the facets relieve the monotony of a precious stone by causing it to imitate all kinds of fire; fascinating manœuvres, the secret of which belongs to loving hearts, and which make women loyal to the artist's hand beneath which forms are born again always new, to the voice which never repeats a phrase without revivifying it with new modulations. Love is not a sentiment simply, it is an art as well. Some trivial remark, a precaution, a mere nothing, reveals to a woman the great and sublime artist who can touch her heart without withering it. The further Emmanuel went, the more charming were the expressions of his love.

"I have anticipated Pierquin," he said, one evening; "he is coming to tell you some bad news, but I preferred to tell you myself. Your father has sold your forest to speculators, who have sold it again in lots; the trees are already cut, and all the timber taken away. Monsieur Claes received three hundred thousand francs in cash, which he has used towards paying his debts in Paris; and in order to pay them in full he has had to make an assignment of one hundred thousand of the three hundred thousand still to be paid by the purchasers."

Pierquin entered.

"Well, my dear cousin," he said, "you are ruined at last! I told you it would be so, but you refused to listen to me. Your father has a good appetite. He has swallowed your forest at one mouthful. Your

substitute guardian, Monsieur Conyncks, is at Amsterdam, winding up his affairs there, and Monsieur Claes seized the opportunity to strike his blow. It is not right. I have just written to Goodman Conyncks; but by the time he arrives everything will be gone. You will be compelled to proceed against your father; the suit will not be a long one, but it will be a dishonorable suit, and Monsieur Conyncks cannot avoid bringing it; the law requires it. This is the result of your obstinacy! Do you realize now how prudent I was, how devoted to your interests?"

"I have some good news for you, mademoiselle," said young de Solis in his sweet voice: "Gabriel is admitted to the Ecole Polytechnique. The obstacles which stood in the way of his admission have been removed."

Marguerite thanked her friend, with a smile, and said:

"My savings will come in handily.—Martha, we will attend to Gabriel's outfit.—Dear Félicie, we shall have to work very hard," she said, kissing her sister on the forehead.

"To-morrow, he will come home for ten days, he must be at Paris on November 15th."

"My cousin Gabriel is taking a wise course," said the notary, eyeing the principal, "he will need to make a fortune for himself. But, my dear cousin, the pressing duty now is to save the honor of the family; will you listen to me to-day?"

"No," she said, "if it is still a matter of marrying."

“But what are you going to do?”

“I, cousin?—nothing.”

“You are of age, you know.”

“I shall be in a few days. Have you any plan to propose by which our interests can be reconciled with what we owe to our father and to the honor of the family?”

“We can do nothing without your uncle, cousin. That being so, I will come again when he has returned.”

“Adieu, monsieur,” said Marguerite.

“The poorer she grows, the more she plays the proud minx,” thought the notary.—“Adieu, mademoiselle,” he said, aloud.—“Monsieur le proviseur, your most obedient servant.”

And he went away without paying any heed to Félicie or Martha.

“I have been studying the Code for two days, and I have consulted an old advocate, a friend of my uncle,” said Emmanuel in a trembling voice. “If you authorize me to do it, I will start for Amsterdam to-morrow. Listen, dear Marguerite—”

It was the first time he had addressed her so; she thanked him with a melting glance, a smile, and an inclination of the head. He paused, glancing at Félicie and Martha.

“Speak before my sister,” said Marguerite. “She does not need this discussion to help her to be resigned to our life of privation and toil, she is so sweet and brave! but she ought to know how necessary courage is to us.”

The two sisters clasped hands and kissed, as if to exchange a fresh pledge of their union in the face of unhappiness.

“Leave us, Martha.”

“Dear Marguerite,” continued Emmanuel, manifesting in his tone the joy he felt in having earned the slightest privileges of affection, “I have procured the names and residences of the purchasers who owe the two hundred thousand francs still unpaid of the price of the felled wood. To-morrow, if you consent, a solicitor acting in the name of Monsieur Conyncks, who will not disavow his agency, will place protests in their hands. In six days your granduncle will have returned, he will convoke a family council and obtain the emancipation of Gabriel, who is eighteen. You and your brother, being entitled to enjoy your rights, will then demand your share in the price of the wood. Monsieur Claes cannot refuse you the two hundred thousand francs stopped in the purchasers’ hands by the protests; as for the other hundred thousand which will still be due you, you will obtain a mortgage on the house in which you live. Monsieur Conyncks will demand security for the three hundred thousand francs due to Mademoiselle Félicie and Jean. Under those circumstances, your father will be compelled to place further mortgages on his property in the plain of Orchies, which is already encumbered to the amount of three hundred thousand francs. The law gives a retroactive priority to notes taken in the interest of minors; so that everything will be saved. Thereafter

Monsieur Claes's hands will be tied, for your estates are inalienable; he will be able to borrow nothing on his own, which will be pledged beyond their value; everything will be done in the family, without scandal and without litigation. Your father will be obliged to proceed prudently with his experiments, even if he does not cease them altogether."

"True," said Marguerite, "but where will our income be? The hundred thousand francs secured by mortgage of this house will bring us nothing, because we live here. The revenues of the property my father owns in the plain of Orchies will go to pay the interest on the three hundred thousand francs owed to strangers; what are we to live on?"

"In the first place," said Emmanuel, "by investing the fifty thousand francs coming to Gabriel on account of his share, in the public funds, you will have, at the present price, more than four thousand francs a year, which will pay for his board and tuition in Paris. Gabriel cannot dispose of his interest in the mortgage on his father's house, or of the principal sum invested for him; so you need not fear that he will squander a sou, and you will have one less burden to carry. Then you will still have a hundred and fifty thousand francs for yourselves, will you not?"

"My father will ask me for it," she said in despair, "and I shall not have the heart to refuse him."

"Very well, dear Marguerite, you can still save

it by putting it out of your hands. Invest it in the Funds in your brother's name. That sum will give you twelve or thirteen thousand francs a year, which will support you. As emancipated minors cannot dispose of their property without the consent of the family council, you will thus make sure of three years of tranquillity. By that time, your father will probably have solved his problem or abandoned it; Gabriel, having come of age, will restore the money to you in order to settle accounts among you four."

Marguerite requested him to explain once more the provisions of the law, which she did not understand at first. Certainly, it was a novel scene, the two lovers studying the Code, with which Emmanuel had provided himself in order to instruct his beloved concerning the laws relating to the property of minors; she soon grasped the gist of it, thanks to the natural penetration of women, made still keener by love.

On the following day, Gabriel returned to his father's house. When Monsieur de Solis brought him back to Balthazar and informed him of his admission to the Ecole Polytechnique, the father thanked him with a wave of his hand, and said:

"I am very glad; Gabriel will be a scientist!"

"O my dear brother," said Marguerite, when Balthazar had returned to his laboratory, "work hard, and do not spend money extravagantly! Do whatever is necessary, but be economical. When you have leave in Paris, call upon our relatives and

friends, so that you will not contract any of the tastes which ruin young men. Your fees amount to nearly three thousand francs, you will have a thousand for pocket-money, and it ought to be enough."

"I will answer for him," said Emmanuel de Solis, placing his hand upon his pupil's shoulder.

*

A month later, Monsieur Conyncks, acting in concert with Marguerite, had obtained from Claes all the desired security. The plans so wisely formed by Emmanuel de Solis were fully approved and carried out. When confronted with the law, and dealing with his cousin, whose easily alarmed probity was unwilling to compromise questions of honor, Balthazar, ashamed of the sale which he consented to at a time when he was harassed by his creditors, agreed to everything that was demanded of him. Convinced of his ability to repair the wrong he had almost involuntarily done his children, he signed the documents with the preoccupied air of a scholar. He had become utterly improvident, after the manner of the negro who sells his wife for a drop of brandy in the morning, and weeps for her at night. He did not look forward even to the immediate future, he did not ask himself what resources he would have when he had spent his last sou; he pursued his labors, continued his purchases, not realizing that he held only the bare title of his house and of his other property, and that it would be impossible for him, thanks to the strictness of the law, to raise a sou on property of which he was in a certain sense the legal custodian.

The year 1818 passed without catastrophe. The two girls paid the necessary expenses of Jean's

education, and defrayed all the household expenses with the eighteen thousand francs yielded by the funds invested in Gabriel's name, the half-yearly payments being promptly forwarded to them by their brother. Monsieur de Solis lost his uncle in December of that year. One morning, Marguerite learned from Martha that her father had sold his collection of tulips, the furniture of the house on the street, and all the silver plate. She was obliged to repurchase the covers necessary for the table, and had them marked with her cipher. Hitherto she had held her peace as to Balthazar's depredations; but that evening, after dinner, she asked Félicie to leave her alone with her father, and when he had taken his seat as usual by the fireplace in the parlor, she said to him :

“My dear father, you have the right to sell everything here, even your children. Everyone in this house will obey you without a murmur; but I am obliged to remind you that we are without money, that we have hardly enough to live on this year, and that Félicie and I will have to work night and day to pay for Jean's schooling with the price of a lace dress we have undertaken to make. I implore you, dear father, to give up your work.”

“You are right, my child; in six weeks it will all be over! I shall have found the Absolute, or the Absolute is not to be found. You will all be worth millions—”

“Meanwhile, leave us a crust of bread!” rejoined Marguerite.

“Do you mean to say there is no bread here?” said Claes in dismay; “no bread in the house of a Claes! What about all our property?”

“You have cut down the forest of Waignies. The ground is not cleared yet, and cannot yield anything. As for your farms at Orchies, the rents are not sufficient to pay the interest on the money you have borrowed.”

“What are we living on, then?” he asked.

Marguerite pointed to the needle, and added:

“Gabriel’s income is a help, but it isn’t enough. I shall succeed in making both ends meet, if you do not crush me with bills that I don’t expect; you tell me nothing of your purchases in town. When I think that I have enough for my quarter’s bills, and my little arrangements are all made, there comes a bill for soda, potash, zinc, sulphur, Heaven knows what!”

“My dear child, six weeks more of patience; after that I will behave wisely. And you will see marvellous things, my little Marguerite.”

“It is high time that you should think of your affairs. You have sold everything: pictures, tulips, silverware, we have nothing left; at least, do not contract any new debts.”

“I don’t intend to contract any more,” said the old man.

“More!” she cried. “Do you mean that there are some?”

“A mere nothing, trifles,” he replied, lowering his eyes and blushing.

For the first time, Marguerite was humiliated by her father's abasement, and suffered so keenly that she dared not question him.—A month after that scene, a banker of the town came to the house to collect a note for ten thousand francs, signed by Claes. When Marguerite asked the banker to wait until night, expressing her regret that she had not been notified of the payment, he informed her that the house of Protez and Chiffreville had nine others for the same amount, maturing from month to month.

“It is all over!” cried Marguerite, “the hour has come.”

She sent for her father, and strode up and down the parlor, talking to herself:

“I must find a hundred thousand francs, or see our father in prison! What shall I do?”

Balthazar did not come down. Weary of waiting, Marguerite went up to the laboratory. As she entered, she saw her father in the centre of an enormous room, brightly lighted, filled with machines and dusty glass implements; here and there were books, tables covered with ticketed and numbered substances. On all sides, the confusion consequent upon the scientist's preoccupation jostled rudely against the Flemish habit of neatness. That aggregation of retorts, crucibles, metals, fantastically colored crystals, specimens hanging on the walls or tossed upon the furnaces, was dominated by the figure of Balthazar Claes, who, without a coat, bare-armed like a common mechanic, displayed a breast

covered with hair as white as that on his head. His eyes were fastened in a ghastly stare upon a pneumatic machine. The receiver of the machine was capped by a lens formed by double convex glasses, the space between them being filled with alcohol; and in that lens were concentrated the rays of the sun which entered the room through one portion of the rose-window of the garret. The receiver, the disc of which was insulated, was connected with the wires of an immense Voltaic battery. Lemulquinier, who was engaged in turning the disc, the machine being mounted on a movable axis, so as to keep the lens always perpendicular to the sun's rays, rose, his face black with dust, and said:

“Oh! mademoiselle, don't come near!”

The sight of her father, who, as he almost knelt by his machine, received the sun's rays full upon his face, and whose sparse locks resembled silver threads, his skull humped, his features distorted by horrible suspense, the oddity of the objects by which he was surrounded, the obscurity of some portions of that vast garret from which strange machines peered forth—all these things contributed to make a deep impression on Marguerite, who said to herself in dire dismay:

“My father is mad!”

She went to him and whispered:

“Send Lemulquinier away.”

“No, no, my child, I need him; I am awaiting the result of a fine experiment of which nobody else has ever thought. For three days we have been

waiting for a ray of sunshine. I have a method of subjecting metals, in a perfect vacuum, to the concentrated solar rays and to electric currents. In a moment, you see, the most powerful force which a chemist can command will manifest itself, and I alone—”

“Oh, father, instead of vaporizing metals, you would do well to keep them to pay your notes of hand.”

“Wait, wait!”

“Monsieur Mersktus has been here, father: he must have ten thousand francs at four o'clock.”

“Yes, yes, in a moment. I signed those little notes for this month, I know. I thought I should have found the Absolute. My God! if I had the July sun, my experiment would be done!”

He ran his hands through his hair, sat down on a wretched cane-seated chair, and tears gathered in his eyes.

“Monsieur is right!” said Lemulquinier. “It’s all the fault of that rascal of a sun; he’s too weak, the coward, the sluggard!”

Neither the master nor the servant paid any further attention to Marguerite.

“Leave us, Mulquinier,” she said.

“Ah! I am trying a new experiment!” cried Claes.

“Forget your experiments, father,” said his daughter, when they were alone; “you have a hundred thousand francs to pay, and we haven’t a sou. Leave your laboratory, your honor is at stake to-day.

What will become of you when you are in prison? Will you sully your white hairs and the name of Claes by the disgrace of bankruptcy? I will protest against it. I shall have the strength to combat your madness, and it would be frightful to see you without bread in your last days. Open your eyes to our position, and listen to reason at last, I beseech you!"

"Madness!" cried Balthazar, drawing himself up, fixing his gleaming eyes upon his daughter, and folding his arms across his breast as he repeated the word *madness* so majestically that Marguerite trembled. "Ah! your mother would never have said that to me!" he continued; "she realized the importance of my investigations, she studied a science in order to understand me, she knew that I was working for mankind, that there is nothing selfish or sordid in me. The affection of the loving wife is, I see, superior to filial affection. Yes, love is the most beautiful of all sentiments! Listen to reason!" he added, striking his breast, "do I lack reason? am I not myself? We are poor, my child, and it is my will. I am your father; obey me. I will make you rich when I choose. Your fortune; why, it is a mere bagatelle. When I have found a substance that will dissolve carbon, I will fill your parlor with diamonds; and that is a trifle in comparison with what I am seeking. You can well afford to wait when I am consuming myself in superhuman efforts."

"Father, I have no right to ask you to account for the four millions you have swallowed up without result in this garret. I will say nothing of my

mother, whom you killed. If I had a husband, I should undoubtedly love him as dearly as my mother loved you, and I should be ready to sacrifice everything to him as she sacrificed everything to you. I followed her orders by giving myself to you absolutely, I have proved it to you by not marrying in order not to compel you to render an account of your guardianship. Let us leave the past, and think of the present. I have come here to put before you the necessity which you yourself have created. We must have money to pay your notes, do you understand? There is nothing here to be seized except the portrait of our ancestor Van Claes. I come, therefore, in the name of my mother, who was too weak to defend her children against their father, and who bade me resist you, I come in the name of my brothers and sister, I come, father, in the name of all the Claes, to order you to cease your experiments, and to make a fortune for yourself before you continue them. If you arm yourself with your paternal authority, which only makes itself felt to kill us, I have on my side your ancestors and honor, which speak louder than chemistry. Families take precedence of science. I have been too good a daughter to you!"

"And now you mean to be my executioner!" he said in a faint voice.

Marguerite fled to avoid laying aside the rôle she had assumed; she fancied that she could hear her mother's voice saying to her: "Do not vex your father too much; love him dearly!"

“Mademoiselle did a fine piece of work up yonder!” said Lemulquinier, when he came down to the kitchen for breakfast. “We were just going to put our hands on the secret; all we needed was just a thread of July sunshine; for monsieur—ah! what a man!—is in the good Lord’s shoes, you might say! We lacked no more than that,” he said to Josette, snapping the nail of his right thumb against his teeth, “of finding the universal element. Slap, bang! she must come and begin to cry out about some wretched notes.”

“Very well, pay the notes with your wages!” said Martha.

“Isn’t there any butter to put on my bread?” Lemulquinier asked Josette.

“Where’s the money to buy it?” retorted the cook, sharply. “Why, you old monster, if you make gold in your devil’s kitchen, why don’t you make a little butter? that wouldn’t be so hard to do, and you could sell it at the market for something to keep the kettle boiling. We people eat dry bread! The two young ladies get along with bread and nuts; do you expect to be fed better than your masters, pray? Mademoiselle says that we can’t spend but a hundred francs a month for the whole house; we don’t cook but one dinner now. If you want luxuries, you have your furnaces upstairs where you fricassee pearls, and nobody talks of anything else at market. Make some roast chickens, why don’t you?”

Lemulquinier took his bread and left the room.

“He’s going to buy something with his own money,” said Martha; “all the better, it will be so much saved. What a miser he is, the Turk!”

“We must capture him by starvation,” said Josette. “It’s a week now since he’s done a stroke of work; he’s always up in the garret and I do his work for him; he can well afford to pay me for it by treating us to a few herrings; let him bring them and see how quick I’ll take them away from him!”

“Ah!” said Martha, “I hear Mademoiselle Marguerite crying. Her old devil of a father will swallow the whole house without saying a Christian word, the sorcerer! In my country, they’d have burned him alive; but here there’s no more religion than there is among the Moors in Africa.”

Mademoiselle Claes could hardly stifle her sobs as she hurried through the gallery. She reached her room, took out her mother’s letter, and read what follows:

“If God permits, my child, my spirit will be in your heart when you read these lines, the last I shall ever write! they are full of love for my dear children, whom I leave behind at the mercy of a demon I have been unable to resist. He will have consumed your bread, as he has devoured my life, yes, and my love! You know, my beloved, whether I loved your father! I shall die loving him less, because I am taking measures against him which I would not have confessed in my lifetime. Yes, I shall have kept in my coffin one last resource for the day when you have reached the utmost limit of misfortune. If he has reduced you to destitution, or if it is necessary to save your honor, my child, you will find in the hands of Monsieur de Solis, if he is living, if not, in the hands

of his nephew, our dear Emmanuel, about one hundred and sixty thousand francs, which will enable you to live. If nothing has availed to overcome his passion, if his children prove not to be a stronger barrier in his path than my happiness has been, and do not check him in his criminal career, leave your father—for you must live! I could not desert him, I owed myself to him. Do you, Marguerite, save the family! I give you absolution for whatever you do in defence of Gabriel, Jean, and Félicie. Have courage, be the guardian angel of the Claes! Be firm; I dare not say be pitiless, but, in order to repair the damage already done, you must preserve some fortune, and you must look upon yourself as being already reduced to want, for nothing will check the fury of the passion which has robbed me of everything. So, my daughter, you will prove the greatness of your heart by forgetting your heart; your dissimulation, if you must lie to your father, will be glorious; your acts, however blameworthy they may seem, will be truly heroic, performed with the purpose of protecting the family. The virtuous Monsieur de Solis has given me his assurance to that effect, and never was conscience purer or more clear-sighted than his. I should not have had the strength to say this to you, even on my death-bed. In this terrible conflict, be always respectful and kind! Resist even while you love, refuse gently. I shall have shed tears unknown to all, I shall have had sorrows which will not come to light until after my death.—Kiss my dear children for me at the moment when you thus become their shield and protection. May God and the saints be with you!

“JOSÉPHINE.”

To the letter was appended an acknowledgment from Messieurs de Solis, uncle and nephew, who agreed to hand the sum deposited with them by Madame Claes to that one of her children who should present the document.

“Martha,” cried Marguerite to the duenna, who

promptly answered her call, "go to Monsieur Emmanuel and request him to call upon me.—Noble and reserved creature! he has never mentioned this to me," she thought, "to me whose burdens and sorrows have become his!"

Emmanuel arrived before Martha had returned.

"You have had secrets from me!" she said, showing him the paper.

Emmanuel hung his head.

"Are you very unhappy, Marguerite?" he rejoined, and the tears glistened in his eyes.

"Oh, yes! Be my support—my mother calls you here *our dear Emmanuel*," she said, pointing to the letter, and unable to repress a joyous gesture at the thought that her choice was approved by her mother.

"My blood and my life were yours from the day I saw you in the gallery," he replied, weeping with joy and sorrow; "but I did not know, I dared not hope that the day would come when you would accept my blood. If you know me well, you must know that my word is sacred. Forgive me for my absolute compliance with your mother's wishes; it was not for me to criticise her intentions."

"You have saved us!" she said, interrupting him, and taking his arm to go down to the parlor.

When she had learned the source of the money held by Emmanuel, Marguerite confided to him the melancholy necessity which confronted the family.

"We must pay the notes," said Emmanuel. "If Mersktus has them all, you will save the interest.

I will hand you the seventy thousand francs which will then remain. My poor uncle left me a like sum in ducats, which it will be easy to bring here secretly."

"Yes," she said, "bring them at night; when my father is asleep, we will hide it. If he knew that I had money, perhaps he would take it from me by force. O Emmanuel, to think of having to distrust one's father!" she said, weeping bitterly and resting her head against the young man's heart.

That graceful, heart-broken movement, whereby Marguerite seemed to implore protection, was the first expression of that love, still enveloped in melancholy, still confined within a sphere of sorrow; but that too full heart had to overflow, and it overflowed beneath its burden of unhappiness.

"What shall I do? what will become of us? He sees nothing, cares for nothing, neither for us nor himself, for I do not know how he can live in that garret, the air is so hot and stifling."

"What can you expect of a man who cries at every moment, like Richard III.: 'My kingdom for a horse!'" rejoined Emmanuel. "He will always be pitiless, and you must be as pitiless as he. Pay his notes, give him your fortune if you please; but your brothers' and your sister's is neither yours nor his."

"Give him my fortune?" she exclaimed, pressing Emmanuel's hand, and casting a glance of fire at him; "you advise me to do it! whereas Pierquin told innumerable lies to preserve it for me!"

“Alas! perhaps I am selfish in my own way,” he replied. “Sometimes, I wish that you were penniless, it seems to me that you would be nearer to me; at other times, I wish that you were rich, happy, and it seems to me a degrading thing to think of two people as separated by the paltry grandeur of fortune.”

“Dear, let us not speak of ourselves—”

“Ourselves!” he repeated, ecstatically.

Then, after a pause, he added:

“It is a great disaster, but not irreparable.”

“It must be repaired by us alone, the Claes family no longer has a head. Into how deep an abyss he must have fallen to reach a point where he is neither father nor man, where he has no idea of what is just or unjust—for he, who was once so great and noble and upright, has, in spite of the law, wasted the property of children whose protector he should have been! Great Heaven! what is he seeking?”

“Unfortunately, my dear Marguerite, although, as the head of a family, he is doing wrong, from a scientific standpoint he is doing right, and a score of men in Europe will admire him while everybody else calls him mad; but you need have no scruples in refusing him the property of his children. A discovery in science has always been a matter of luck. If your father is destined to find the solution of his problem, he will find it without so much expense, and perhaps just at the moment when he has despaired of it!”

“My poor mother is fortunate!” said Marguerite;

“she must have suffered death a thousand times over before dying, and she succumbed in her first battle against science. But it is a battle without end—”

“There is an end,” said Emmanuel. “When you have nothing left, Monsieur Claes can obtain no credit, and he will stop.”

“Then let him stop to-day!” cried Marguerite, “we are at the end of our resources.”

Monsieur de Solis went and paid the notes, and handed them to Marguerite. Balthazar came down a few moments before dinner, contrary to his custom. For the first time in two years, his daughter detected in his features the indications of a mental depression horrible to contemplate: he had become a father once more, sense had banished science. He looked into the courtyard and into the garden, and when he was certain that he was alone with his daughter, he walked up to her with a gesture instinct with affectionate melancholy.

“My child,” he said, taking her hand and pressing it with effusive tenderness, “forgive your old father. Yes, Marguerite, I have done wrong. You alone are right. So long as I have failed to find what I sought, I am a miserable wretch! I will go away from here. I do not wish to see Van Claes sold,” he said, pointing to the martyr’s portrait. “He died for liberty, I shall have died for science; revere him, hate me—”

“Hate you, father? No, no!” she said, throwing herself upon his breast, “we all adore you.—Don’t

we, Félicie?" she asked her sister, who entered the room at the moment.

"What's the matter, father dear?" said the girl, taking his hand.

"I have ruined you."

"Oh! our brothers will make a fortune for us. Jean is always first in his class."

"See, father," said Marguerite, leading Balthazar to the fireplace by a movement full of grace and filial cajolery; "here are your notes," she said, taking several papers from under the clock, "but do not sign any more; there will be nothing to pay them with."

"You have money, then?" said Balthazar, in her ear, when he had recovered from his surprise.

That question tortured the heroic girl, there was such a delirious expression of joy and hope in her father's face as he looked about, as if expecting to discover gold.

"Father," she replied in a sorrowful tone, "I have my own fortune."

"Give it to me!" he exclaimed, with a greedy gesture, "I will repay you a hundred-fold."

"Yes, I will give it to you," Marguerite replied, gazing steadfastly at Balthazar, who did not understand the meaning his daughter placed upon the remark.

"Ah! my dear girl, you save my life! I have thought of one last experiment, after which nothing more will be possible. If I do not find it this time, I must abandon the search for the Absolute.

Come, my darling child, give me your arm, I would like to make you the happiest woman on earth; you restore me to happiness, to glory; you give me the power to overwhelm you with treasures, I will pour out wealth and jewels upon you."

He kissed his daughter's forehead, took both her hands, pressed them, manifested his joy by cajoleries which seemed almost servile to Marguerite. During dinner, Balthazar saw only her, he watched her eagerly and attentively, with the animation a lover displays for his mistress; if she moved, he tried to divine her thought, her wish, and left his seat to wait upon her; he made her ashamed, his attentions were marked by a sort of youthful ardor which contrasted strangely with his premature old age. But Marguerite met his cajoleries with the picture of their present distress, now by a word of doubt, again by a glance at the empty shelves of the sideboards in that dining-room.

"Pshaw!" he said to her, "in six months we will fill them with gold and beautiful things. You shall be like a queen. Why, all nature will belong to us, we shall be above everything—and through you, my Marguerite—Margarita!" he continued, with a smile; "your name is a prophecy. Margarita means a pearl. Sterne says so somewhere. Have you read Sterne? would you like a Sterne? It will amuse you."

"The pearl, they say, is the result of a disease," she replied, bitterly; "and we have suffered much already."

“Do not be depressed, you will secure the happiness of those you love, you will be very powerful, very rich.”

“Mademoiselle has such a kind heart!” said Lemulquinier, whose skimmer-like face expanded painfully with a smile.

During all the rest of the evening, Balthazar displayed for the benefit of his two daughters all his attractive qualities, and all the charm of his conversation. Seductive as the serpent, his words, his glances, evolved a magnetic current, and he put forth lavishly that power of genius, that gentle wit, which formerly fascinated his wife, and thereby admitted his two daughters to his heart, so to speak. When Emmanuel de Solis came, he found the father and the children together for the first time in many weeks. Notwithstanding his reserve, the young professor yielded to the influence of that scene, for Balthazar's manner and conversation exerted an irresistible attraction. Although buried in the depths of thought and engrossed in observing the moral world, scientific men none the less remark the smallest details of the sphere in which they live. Uncongenial rather than absent-minded, they are never in harmony with their surroundings, they know and forget everything; they prejudge the future, prophesy for themselves alone, are fully informed as to events before they happen, but never say anything about them. If, in the silence of their meditations, they have made use of their power to realize what is going on about them, it is enough

for them to have divined it; their work runs away with them, and they almost always make a false application of the knowledge they have acquired concerning the affairs of life. Sometimes, when they awake from their social apathy, or when they fall from the moral world into the external world, they make their appearance there with a richly-stored memory and are strangers to nothing.

Thus Balthazar, who combined perspicacity of the heart with perspicacity of the brain, was familiar with his daughter's past life, he knew or had divined the slightest incidents of the mysterious love which united her to Emmanuel, he proved it to them with delicacy, and sanctioned their attachment by sharing it. It was the sweetest flattery that a father could indulge in, and the two lovers were unable to resist it. That evening was the more delightful by reason of the contrast it presented to the troubles which beset the lives of those poor children. When, after he had filled them with his light and bathed them in affection, so to speak, Balthazar retired, Emmanuel de Solis, who up to that time had been visibly embarrassed, took from his pockets three thousand ducats, which he had kept there, afraid to let the old man see them. He placed them on Marguerite's work-table, where she covered them with the linen she was mending; then he went to fetch the rest of the money. When he returned, Félicie had gone to bed. The clock was striking eleven. Martha, who was sitting up to undress her mistress, was busied with Félicie.

“Where can I hide this?” said Marguerite, who had not been able to resist the pleasure of handling a few ducats, a childish impulse which proved to be her ruin!

“I will lift this marble column, the pedestal of which is hollow,” said Emmanuel, “you can slip in the rolls, and the devil himself would not go there to look for them.”

Just as Marguerite was making her last trip but one from the work-table to the column, she uttered a piercing shriek and dropped the rolls, and the gold pieces broke from the paper and scattered over the floor; her father was at the parlor door, and the covetous expression on his face terrified her.

“What are you doing there?” he said, looking from his daughter, who was nailed to the floor by fear, to the young man, who had risen abruptly, but whose attitude beside the column was most significant.

The noise made by the gold on the floor was ominous, and its scattering seemed prophetic.

“I was not mistaken,” said Balthazar, sitting down, “I heard the ring of gold.”

He was no less excited than the two young people, whose hearts beat so perfectly in unison that their movements could be heard like the ticking of a clock amid the profound silence which suddenly fell upon the parlor.

“I thank you, Monsieur de Solis,” said Marguerite, with a meaning glance at the young man, as if to say:

“Help me to save this money.”

“What! all this gold—?” said Balthazar, with a glance of terrifying keenness at his daughter and Emmanuel.

“This gold is monsieur’s; he has been kind enough to lend it to me to honor our obligations,” she replied.

Monsieur de Solis blushed, and started to leave the room.

“Stay, monsieur,” said Balthazar, taking his arm to detain him, “do not go without receiving an expression of my gratitude.”

“You owe me nothing, monsieur. This money belongs to Mademoiselle Marguerite, who has borrowed it from me on her own property,” he replied, looking at his mistress, who thanked him with an imperceptible movement of the eyelids.

“I will not allow that,” said Claes, as he took a pen and sheet of paper from the table at which Félicie had been writing.

Turning to the astonished young people, he added:

“How much is there?”

His passion had made Balthazar more cunning than the shrewdest of rascally stewards: the money should be his. Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis hesitated.

“Let us count it,” said Balthazar.

“There are six thousand ducats,” replied Emmanuel.

“Seventy thousand francs,” rejoined Claes.

The glance which Marguerite bestowed upon her lover gave him courage.

“Monsieur,” he said, respectfully, “your promise

is without value—pray forgive that purely technical expression; I lent mademoiselle a hundred thousand francs this morning to take up notes which you were unable to pay, therefore you can give me no security. The hundred and seventy thousand francs belong to mademoiselle your daughter, who can dispose of it as she sees fit, but I have lent it to her solely on the strength of her promise to sign an agreement whereby I shall be secured by a conveyance of her interest in the bare lands of Waignies.”

Marguerite turned her head away to conceal the tears that came to her eyes; she knew the purity of heart which was Emmanuel’s most distinctive characteristic. Brought up by his uncle to the strictest observance of the religious virtues, the young man had an especial horror of falsehood; thus, after offering his heart and his life to Marguerite, he also sacrificed his conscience to her.

“Adieu, monsieur,” said Balthazar, “I believed that you had more confidence in a man who looks upon you with a father’s eyes.”

Having exchanged a sorrowful glance with Marguerite, Emmanuel was ushered out by Martha, who locked the street door. As soon as the father and the daughter were alone, Claes said to her:

“You love me, do you not?”

“Do not beat about the bush, father: you want this money, do you not? you shall not have it.”

She began to pick up the ducats; her father silently assisted her to do it and to verify the amount she had dropped; and Marguerite allowed him to assist,

without manifesting the slightest suspicion. When the ducats were arranged in piles once more, Balthazar said, despairingly:

“Marguerite, I must have this gold!”

“It would be robbery if you should take it,” she replied, coolly. “Listen to me, father: it is better to kill us at a single stroke than to make us suffer a thousand deaths every day. Tell me, which of us, you or I, must yield?”

“You will have murdered your father!” he exclaimed.

“We shall have avenged our mother,” she retorted, pointing to the place where Madame Claes had died.

“My daughter, if you knew all that is at stake, you would not use such words to me. Listen, I will explain the problem to you.—But you would not understand me!” he cried in despair. “However, give it to me! trust your father for once. Yes, I know that I made your mother unhappy; that I have squandered, to use the word of ignorant people, my own fortune and impaired yours; that you are all working because of what you call madness; but, my angel, my beloved, my love, my Marguerite, pray listen to me! If I do not succeed, I give myself to you, I will obey you as you ought to obey me; I will do whatever you wish, I will place the management of my property in your hands, I will cease to be the guardian of my children, I will strip myself of all authority—I swear it by your mother!” he said, weeping.

Marguerite turned her head away in order not to see that tear-stained face, and Claes threw himself at her feet, thinking that she was about to yield.

“Marguerite, Marguerite! give it to me, give it to me! What are sixty thousand francs as the price of avoiding everlasting remorse! I shall die, I tell you, this will kill me.—Listen to me! my word shall be sacredly kept. If I fail, I will abandon my labors, I will leave Flanders, yes, France, if you demand it, and I will work like a mechanic to rebuild my fortune sou by sou, so that I may some day return to my children what science has taken from them.”

Marguerite tried to raise him, but he persisted in remaining on his knees, and added, still weeping:

“Be kind and self-sacrificing once more, for the last time! If I do not succeed, I will myself justify you in any harsh treatment of me. You shall call me an old fool! you shall call me a wicked father! you shall even tell me that I am an ignoramus! And when I hear those words I will kiss your hands. You may beat me if you wish; and when you beat me I will bless you as the best of daughters, remembering that you gave me your blood!”

“If only my blood were concerned, I would give it to you,” she cried, “but can I allow my brothers and my sister to be murdered by science?—no!—Say no more, say no more!” she said, wiping her eyes and pushing away her father’s caressing hands.

“Sixty thousand francs and two months!” he said, springing to his feet in a frenzy, “I need only that! but my daughter interposes between fame and

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

Just as Marguerite was making her last trip but one from the work-table to the column, she uttered a piercing shriek and dropped the rolls, and the gold pieces broke from the paper and scattered over the floor; her father was at the parlor door, and the covetous expression on his face terrified her.







wealth and me— My curse on you!” he exclaimed. “You are neither girl nor woman, you have no heart! you will be neither mother nor wife!—Let me take it! my darling pet, my dearest child! I will worship you,” he said, putting out his hand toward the gold with a gesture of savage vehemence.

“I am helpless against violence, but God and the great Claes see us!” said Marguerite, pointing to the portrait.

“Be it so! try to live covered with your father’s blood!” cried Balthazar, gazing at her with an expression of horror.

He rose, looked about the parlor, and walked slowly away. When he reached the door, he turned as a beggar might have done, and questioned his daughter with a gesture to which Marguerite replied by a shake of the head.

“Adieu, my daughter,” he said, gently; “try to be happy.”

When he had disappeared, Marguerite remained in a state of stupefaction, the effect of which was to isolate her from the earth; she was no longer in the parlor, she no longer felt the weight of her body, she had wings, and flew about through the moral world, where everything is immense, where the thought brings distant points and distant periods of time together, where some divine hand raises the veil stretched over the future. It seemed to her that whole days passed between each two of her father’s steps as he ascended the stairs; then she shivered with horror as she heard him enter his

chamber. Guided by a presentiment which enabled her mind to see as by the vivid light of a flash of lightning, she ran upstairs without a candle, noiselessly, with the speed of an arrow, and found her father with a pistol at his temple.

“Take it all!” she cried, rushing toward him.

She sank upon a chair. Balthazar, seeing how pale she was, began to weep as old men weep; he became a child once more, kissed her on the brow, and talked incoherently; he was ready to jump for joy, and seemed to wish to play with her as a lover plays with his mistress after she has made him happy.

“Enough! enough, father!” she said; “remember your promise. If you do not succeed, you will obey me?”

“Yes.”

“O mother!” she cried, turning toward her mother’s bedroom, “you would have given him all, would you not?”

“Sleep in peace,” said Balthazar, “you are a good girl.”

“Sleep!” she rejoined; “I no longer have the peaceful nights of my youth; you are making me old, father, just as you slowly withered mother’s heart.”

“Poor child, I wish that I might set your mind at rest by explaining the effects of the magnificent experiment I have just conceived; you would understand—”

“I understand nothing but our ruin,” she said, as she left him.

The next morning, it being a school holiday, Emmanuel de Solis brought Jean home.

“Well?” he said, sadly, as he greeted Marguerite.

“I yielded,” she replied.

“My dear life,” he said, in an outburst of melancholy joy, “if you had resisted, I should have admired you; but, in your weakness, I adore you!”

“Poor, poor Emmanuel, what shall we have left?”

“Leave it to me!” cried the young man, with a radiant face; “we love each other, all will go well!”

*

Several months passed in perfect tranquillity. Monsieur de Solis convinced Marguerite that her paltry savings would never amount to a fortune, and advised her to live comfortably, using what was left of the money that had been placed in his hands, to defray the household expenses. During that time, Marguerite was tormented by the same anxieties that had made her mother miserable under similar circumstances. However incredulous she may have been, she had gone so far as to place some hope in her father's genius. By an inexplicable phenomenon, many people have hope without faith. Hope is the flower of desire, faith is the fruit of certainty. Marguerite said: "If my father succeeds, we shall be happy!" Only Claes and Lemulquinier said: "We shall succeed!"—Unluckily, Balthazar's face grew sadder from day to day. When he came to dinner, sometimes he dared not look at his daughter, sometimes he cast triumphant glances at her. Marguerite employed her evenings in listening to the elucidation of divers legal puzzles by young De Solis. She overwhelmed her father with questions as to their family relations. At last, she finished her virile education, she was evidently preparing to execute the plan she had formed, in the event that her father succumbed once more in his duel with the *Unknown Quantity*—X.

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Early in July, Balthazar passed a whole day sitting on the bench in his garden, absorbed in melancholy meditation. He gazed at the empty bed where the tulips had been, and at the windows of his wife's bedroom; he shuddered, doubtless, as he thought of all that his struggle had cost him; his movements proved that his thoughts were of other subjects than science. Marguerite went and sat beside him with her work, a few moments before dinner.

"Well, father, you have not succeeded?"

"No, my child."

"Ah!" she rejoined in a soft voice, "I will not utter a single word of reproach; we are equally culpable. I will simply demand that you fulfil your promise, it must be sacred to you, for you are a Claes. Your children surround you with love and respect; but to-day you belong to me and owe me obedience. Have no fear, my reign will be mild; indeed, I will do my best to have it come to an end very soon. I am going to take Martha and leave you for about a month, to look after your interests; for," she added, kissing him on the forehead, "you are my child. After to-morrow, therefore, Félicie will keep the house. The poor child is only seventeen, she could not resist you; be generous, and do not ask her for a sou, for she will have only what is absolutely necessary for the household expenses. Be brave, give up your work and your thoughts for two or three years. The problem will mature, I shall have saved money to solve it, and you shall solve it. Tell me, isn't your queen indulgent?"

“Then all is not lost?” said the old man.

“No, not if you are true to your word.”

“I will obey you, my child,” said Claes, with deep emotion.

The next day, Monsieur Conyncks arrived from Cambrai to take up his grandniece. He was in a post-chaise, and declined to remain at his cousin's for any longer time than Marguerite and Martha required to make their preparations. Monsieur Claes received him hospitably, but he was perceptibly depressed and humiliated. Old Conyncks divined his thoughts, and, while they were at breakfast, said to him, with vulgar frankness:

“I have some of your pictures, cousin; I have a taste for fine pictures; it's a ruinous passion, but we all have our manias, you know.”

“Dear uncle!” said Marguerite.

“You are supposed to be ruined, cousin; but a Claes always has treasures here,” he said, touching his forehead, “and here, too, is it not so?” pointing to his heart. “So I rely on you! I have found a few crowns in my wallet, which I have placed at your disposal.”

“Ah!” cried Balthazar, “I will repay you with treasures—”

“The only treasures we possess here in Flanders are patience and toil,” rejoined the old man, sternly. “Our ancestor has those two words engraved on his forehead,” he added, pointing to the portrait of President Van Claes.

Marguerite embraced her father, bade him adieu,

gave a few parting injunctions to Josette and Félicie, and started for Paris by post. The granduncle, who was a widower, had but one child, a girl of twelve, and was immensely rich; it was not impossible, therefore, that he might choose to act obstinately, and the good people of Douai believed that Mademoiselle Claes would become his wife.

The rumor of that advantageous marriage brought Pierquin back to Claes House. Great changes had taken place in the ideas of that shrewd calculator. Within two years the society of the town had become divided into two hostile camps. The nobility had formed one circle and the bourgeoisie another, naturally very inimical to the first. This abrupt cleavage, which took place throughout France, and divided the realm into two hostile nations, whose mutual jealousy and irritation constantly increased, was one of the principal reasons for the adhesion of the provinces to the Revolution of July, 1830. Between those two social strata, one of which was ultra-monarchical and the other ultra-liberal, were the public functionaries, who were admitted into one circle or the other according to their importance, and were neutral at the time of the downfall of the legitimate line. At the outset of the contest between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, the royalist coffee-parties acquired extraordinary brilliancy, and became such distinguished rivals to the liberal coffee-parties, that those gastronomic functions were said to have cost the lives of several persons, who, like mortars improperly cast, could not stand the strain.

Naturally, the two social strata became exclusive, and went through a weeding-out process. Although very rich for a provincial, Pierquin was shut out from the aristocratic circles, and thrown back upon those of the bourgeoisie. His self-esteem suffered severely from the successive snubs which he received when he found himself being courteously turned out-of-doors by men with whom he had lately been on intimate terms. He was approaching forty, the limit of age at which men who propose to marry can hope to marry young women. The young women to whom he was at liberty to aspire belonged to the bourgeoisie, and his ambition was bent upon remaining in the upper social circle, into which an aristocratic alliance would introduce him.

The isolation in which the Claes family lived had kept them in ignorance of this social phenomenon. Although Claes belonged to the old provincial aristocracy, it was probable that his preoccupations would interfere with his espousal of the antipathies created by the new classification of individuals. However poor she might be, a Demoiselle Claes would bring to her husband that treasure of vanity which all parvenus crave. Pierquin resumed his visits to Claes House, therefore, with the secret purpose of making the sacrifices necessary to enable him to negotiate a marriage which would realize all his ambitions. He favored Balthazar and Félicie with his company during Marguerite's absence, but he was slow to recognize a formidable

rival in Emmanuel de Solis. The deceased abbé's inheritance was supposed to amount to a considerable sum; and in the eyes of a man who artlessly reduced everything in life to figures, the young heir seemed more to be dreaded by reason of his money than by the charming qualities of his heart, as to which Pierquin never troubled himself.

That fortune restored to the name of Solis all its splendor. Wealth and noble birth were like two lustrous objects which, by illuminating each other, doubled their brilliancy. The sincere affection manifested by the young professor for Félicie, whom he treated like a sister, aroused the notary's emulation. He tried to eclipse Emmanuel by mingling fashionable jargon and expressions of superficial gallantry with the dreamy airs, the thoughtful discourse, which were so suited to his face. Declaring that he was disenchanted with everything in the world, he would turn his eyes upon Félicie in such a way as to make her think that she alone could reconcile him to life. Félicie, to whom no man had ever paid compliments before, listened to that language, always so sweet to hear even when it is false; she mistook emptiness for depth, and in the need which she felt of giving definiteness to the vague sentiments with which her heart overflowed, she gave her attention to her cousin. Jealous, perhaps unconsciously, of the loving attentions which Emmanuel lavished on her sister, she doubtless wished that she might herself be, like Marguerite, the object of the glances, the thoughts, and the affections of a man.

Pierquin easily detected the preference which Félicie accorded him over Emmanuel, and that was an incentive to him to persist in his efforts, so that he involved himself more deeply than he intended. Emmanuel watched the early stages of this passion, false in the notary, ingenuous in Félicie, whose future was at stake. There were divers tender conversations between the cousins, words exchanged in undertones behind Emmanuel's back,—in a word, those petty deceptions which give to a glance, to a word, a meaning whose insidious sweetness may lead to innocent faults.

Pierquin tried to make use of his intimacy with Félicie to probe the secret of Marguerite's journey, in order to ascertain whether it had to do with her marriage and if he must renounce his hopes; but, notwithstanding his awkward cunning, neither Balthazar nor Félicie could give him any information, for the reason that they knew nothing of Marguerite's plans: in assuming supreme power, she seemed to have followed the maxim of the supreme power of the State, by keeping her own counsel as to her plans. Balthazar's gloomy depression and his failing strength made the evenings exceedingly dull. Although Emmanuel had succeeded in making the chemist play backgammon, his mind was never on the game; and most of the time that man, great as he was in intellect, seemed stupid. Disappointed in his hopes, humiliated at having devoured three fortunes, a penniless gambler, he bent under the weight of his ruins, under the burden of his betrayed rather

than destroyed hopes. That man of genius, muzzled by necessity, condemning himself, presented a truly tragic spectacle which would have touched the least susceptible of men. Pierquin himself could not look without respect upon that caged lion, whose eyes, full of restrained power, had become calm through melancholy, dull through superabundance of light; whose glances besought alms which the mouth dared not offer. Sometimes a gleam passed across that withered face, which became animated anew with the idea of a new experiment; then, if Balthazar's eyes, as he gazed about the parlor, chanced to rest on the spot where his wife had expired, tears would gather like grains of burning sand in the desert of his eyes, made immense by thought, and his head would fall forward on his breast. He had raised the world, like a Titan, and the world was growing heavier on his shoulders.

That colossal sorrow, so courageously restrained, had its effect on both Pierquin and Emmanuel, who sometimes felt so deeply moved that they were inclined to offer him the money necessary for a series of experiments; so infectious are the convictions of genius! They both realized how Madame Claes and Marguerite might have been induced to toss millions into that abyss; but reason speedily checked the impulses of the heart; and their emotion found vent in words of consolation which sharpened the pangs of that crushed Titan. Claes did not mention his oldest daughter, and expressed no uneasiness concerning her absence or her silence, for she wrote

neither to him nor to Félicie. When De Solis or Pierquin asked for news of her, he seemed to be affected unpleasantly by their questions. Had he a presentiment that Marguerite was acting against him? Did he feel humiliated because he had resigned the majestic rights of paternity to his child? Had his love for her diminished, because she was to be the father thenceforth and he the child? It may be that many of these arguments and many of these sentiments passed like clouds through his mind, in the mute disgrace for which he held Marguerite responsible.

However great great men may be, known or unknown, fortunate or unfortunate in their aspirations, they have some pettinesses of character by which they are allied to the rest of mankind. They have the twofold misfortune of suffering no less through their good qualities than through their faults; and it may be that Balthazar had yet to familiarize himself with the pangs of his wounded vanity. The life that he led, and the evenings that those four passed together during Marguerite's absence, were, therefore, stamped with melancholy, filled with undefined apprehensions. The days were as unfertile as arid moors, where, however, they gleaned a few flowers, infrequent consolations. The atmosphere seemed hazy to them in the absence of the oldest daughter, who had become the soul, the strength, and the hope of that family.

Two months passed thus, during which Balthazar patiently awaited his daughter's return. Marguerite

was escorted back to Douai by her uncle, who remained at the house instead of returning to Cambrai, doubtless to give the support of his authority to some *coup d'état* meditated by his niece. Marguerite's return was made the occasion of a little family fête. The notary and Monsieur de Solis had been invited by Balthazar and Félicie. When the post-chaise stopped at the door, those four went out to meet the travellers with effusive demonstrations of delight. Marguerite seemed happy to be beneath the paternal roof once more, and her eyes filled with tears when she crossed the courtyard on her way to the parlor. When she embraced her father, her thoughts were not free from reservations, and she blushed like a guilty wife who does not know how to pretend; but her glances recovered their limpid purity when she looked at Monsieur de Solis, from whom she seemed to acquire strength to finish the undertaking upon which she had secretly embarked. During dinner, despite the gayety which enlivened their faces and their words, the father and the daughter eyed each other with suspicion and curiosity. Balthazar asked Marguerite no questions concerning her stay in Paris, probably from a sense of paternal dignity. Emmanuel de Solis imitated that reserve. But Pierquin, who was in the habit of knowing all the family secrets, said to Marguerite, disguising his curiosity beneath a false affability:

“Well, my dear cousin, I suppose you saw everything in Paris, the theatres?—”

“I saw nothing in Paris,” she replied, “I did not

go there for amusement. The days passed sadly enough for me; I was too impatient to see Douai again."

"If I had not lost my temper with her, she wouldn't even have gone to the Opéra, where she was bored, by the way!" said Monsieur Conyncks.

It was a painful evening, everybody was embarrassed, smiled with difficulty, or struggled to display that forced cheerfulness beneath which real anxiety is concealed. Marguerite and Balthazar were under the spell of secret, painful apprehensions, which reacted upon their hearts. As the evening advanced, the faces of the father and the daughter became more and more disturbed. Sometimes Marguerite tried to smile, but her gestures, her expression, the tone of her voice, betrayed the keenest anxiety. Messieurs Conyncks and De Solis seemed to know the cause of the noble girl's suppressed excitement, and sought to encourage her by meaning glances. Hurt because he was kept in ignorance of a decision concerning himself and of steps taken in pursuance thereof, Balthazar insensibly held aloof from his children and his friends, ostentatiously refraining from speaking. Doubtless, Marguerite was about to disclose what she had decided to do with him. That was an intolerable position for a great man, for a father. Having reached an age at which one ceases to dissemble his thoughts among his children, where the wide range of ideas gives force to the feelings, he became more and more serious, thoughtful, and morose as

he saw that the moment of his civil death was drawing near.

That evening contained one of those crises in domestic life which can be described only by metaphor. The thunder-clouds were gathering in the sky, in the fields laughter was rife; everyone was oppressively warm, felt the storm coming, raised his head and went his way. Monsieur Conyncks went off to bed first, and was shown to his room by Balthazar. During his absence, Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis took their leave. Marguerite bade the notary an affectionate good-night; she said nothing to Emmanuel, but pressed his hand and bestowed a tearful glance upon him. She sent Félicie away, and when Claes returned to the parlor, he found his daughter alone.

“My dear father,” she said in a trembling voice, “it required circumstances as grave as our present ones to induce me to leave the house; but after much anguish of mind, after surmounting many extraordinary obstacles, I have returned with some prospect of salvation for us all. Thanks to your name, to your uncle’s influence, and that of Monsieur de Solis, we have obtained for you the post of receiver of taxes in Bretagne; it is said to be worth eighteen to twenty thousand francs a year. Our uncle deposited the necessary security.—Here is your appointment,” she added, taking a paper from her bag. “Your life here, during our years of privations and sacrifice, would be intolerable. Our father must live in a position at least equal to that in which he

has always lived. I will not ask you for any part of your salary, you may use it in any way you choose. I simply beg you to remember that we have not one sou of income, and that we must all live upon what Gabriel gives us out of his. The town will know nothing of this monastic life. If you were at home, you would be an obstacle to the success of the methods my sister and I must employ in our attempt to acquire a competence. Am I abusing the authority you have given me by placing you in a position to rebuild your fortune for yourself? In a few years, if you choose, you will be receiver-general."

"And so, Marguerite," said Balthazar, mildly, "you turn me out of my own house—"

"I do not deserve such a harsh reproach," replied the girl, repressing the tumultuous beating of her heart. "You will return to us when you are able to live in your native town as it befits you to live here. Moreover, father, have I not your word?" she added, coldly. "You must obey me. My uncle remained here in order to go with you to Bretagne, so that you need not make the journey alone."

"I will not go!" cried Balthazar, rising from his chair; "I do not need anyone's help to establish my fortune anew and pay what I owe my children."

"It will be better," rejoined Marguerite, unmoved. "I will simply ask you to reflect on our respective positions, which I will set before you in very few words. If you remain in this house, your children will leave it, so that you may be in full control."

“Marguerite!” cried Balthazar.

“Furthermore,” she continued, not choosing to notice her father’s irritation, “you must inform the minister of your refusal, if you do refuse a lucrative and honorable position, which, notwithstanding our efforts, and the influence we possessed, we could not have obtained without certain thousand-franc notes which my uncle adroitly slipped into a woman’s glove.”

“Leave me!”

“Either you will leave us or we will run away from you,” she rejoined. “If I were your only child, I would do as my mother did, without murmuring against the fate you impose upon me. But my sister and my two brothers shall not die of hunger or of despair with you; I promised her who died there,” she said, pointing to her mother’s bed. “We have concealed our sorrows from you, we have suffered in silence; to-day our strength is exhausted. We are not on the brink of an abyss, we are in its depths, father! To extricate ourselves from it, not only must we have courage, but our efforts must not be constantly balked by the caprices of a passion—”

“My dear children!” cried Balthazar, seizing Marguerite’s hand, “I will assist you, I will work, I—”

“Here is the way,” she replied, handing him the commission.

“But, my angel, the method that you suggest to me for making my fortune is too slow! you force me to lose the fruit of ten years’ toil and the enormous

sums that my laboratory represents. There," he said, pointing to the garret, "are all our resources."

Marguerite walked toward the door, saying:

"You must choose, father!"

"Ah! you are very hard, my daughter!" he replied, sinking into a chair and making no effort to detain her.

The next morning, Marguerite learned from Lemulquinier that Monsieur Claes had gone out. That simple announcement made her turn pale, and her expression was so significant of her anxiety, that the old valet said to her:

"Don't be afraid, mademoiselle; monsieur said that he would be at home to breakfast at eleven o'clock. He didn't go to bed. At two o'clock this morning, he was standing at the parlor window, staring at the roof of the laboratory. I was waiting in the kitchen and saw him; he was crying, he felt very bad. This is the famous month of July, when the sun would probably make us all rich; and if you were willing—"

"Enough!" observed Marguerite, divining all the thoughts that must have assailed her father.

In truth, the phenomenon had taken place in Balthazar which takes place in all sedentary persons, and his life depended, so to speak, on the places with which he was identified; his mind being inseparably linked to his house and his laboratory, they had become indispensable to him, as the Bourse is to the speculator, to whom holidays are days thrown away. There were his hopes, thither descended

from above the only atmosphere from which his lungs could draw the breath of life. This attachment of mankind to places and things, so powerful in weak natures, becomes almost tyrannical in men of science and study. To leave his house meant, in Balthazar's case, to renounce science, to renounce his problem—in a word, to die.

Marguerite was intensely agitated until breakfast-time arrived. The scene which had induced Balthazar to try to kill himself returned to her mind, and she feared a tragic dénouement to her father's desperate situation. She went in and out of the parlor, starting every time that the door-bell rang. At last, Balthazar returned. While he was crossing the courtyard, Marguerite, who was anxiously studying his face, detected no other expression than that of tempestuous grief. When he entered the parlor, she walked toward him to wish him good-morning; he put his arm affectionately around her waist, drew her to his heart, kissed her on the forehead, and whispered in her ear:

“I have been to ask for my passport.”

The tone of her father's voice, his resigned expression, his gestures, everything combined to crush the poor girl's heart, and she turned her face away to hide her tears; but, being unable to repress them, she went into the garden and returned after she had wept to her heart's content. During breakfast, Balthazar displayed the cheerful humor of a man who has made up his mind.

“So we are to pay a visit to Bretagne, uncle?” he

said to Monsieur Conyncks. "I have always longed to see that province."

"One can live very cheaply there," replied the old uncle.

"Is father going to leave us?" cried Félicie.

Monsieur de Solis arrived with Jean.

"You can leave him at home to-day," said Balthazar, seating his son by his side; "I am going away to-morrow and I want to bid him good-bye."

Emmanuel glanced at Marguerite, who lowered her eyes. It was a gloomy day, for one and all were sad and depressed, occupied in forcing back unpleasant thoughts or tears. It was not absence merely, but exile. They all instinctively appreciated how humiliating it must be for a father to announce his misfortunes thus publicly, by accepting a distant post and leaving his family, at Balthazar's age. He alone was as great as Marguerite was firm, and seemed to accept in a noble spirit that penance for errors which the frenzy of genius had caused him to commit. When the evening was at an end, and the father and the daughter were alone, Balthazar, who had been as affectionate and loving all day as he was during the happy days of his patriarchal life, held out his hand to Marguerite, and said to her in a tone of affection blended with despair:

"Are you satisfied with your father?"

"You are worthy of him!" replied Marguerite, pointing to a portrait of Van Claes.

The next morning, Balthazar, followed by Lemulquinier, went up to his laboratory as if to bid adieu

to the hopes which he had cherished and which his unfinished experiments represented to him as still alive. The master and the servant exchanged a most melancholy glance as they entered the garret which they were about to leave, perhaps forever. Balthazar gazed at the machines about which his thoughts had hovered so long, and each one of which was connected with the memory of an investigation or an experiment. With a dejected air, he instructed Lemulquinier to allow the gases and dangerous acids to evaporate, and to leave no substances in close proximity which might cause explosions. While taking these precautions, he indulged in bitter regrets, like those which a condemned man utters before going to the scaffold.

“Here,” he said, stopping before a vessel in which the two wires of a voltaic battery were buried, “is an experiment of which we ought to await the result. If it should succeed—horrible thought!—my children would not drive from his home a father who cast diamonds at their feet.—Here is a combination of carbon and sulphur,” he added, talking to himself, “in which the carbon plays the part of electro-positive element; crystallization must begin at the negative pole; and in case of decomposition, the carbon would tend thither in a crystallized form—”

“Ah! that’s how it would be!” exclaimed Lemulquinier, gazing at his master in admiration.

“Now,” continued Balthazar, after a pause, “the combination is subjected to the action of this battery which may act—”

“If monsieur wishes, I will increase its force—”

“No, no, we must leave it as it is. Rest and time are conditions essential to crystallization!”

“*Parbleu!* yes, this crystallization must take its time,” cried the valet.

“If the temperature falls, the sulphate of carbon will crystallize,” said Balthazar, continuing to express in fragments the vague thoughts of a meditation complete in his own understanding; “but if the action of the battery takes place under certain conditions which I do not know— We must look out for that—it is possible— But what am I thinking about? We have nothing more to do with chemistry, my good fellow, we are going to collect taxes in Bretagne.”

Claes hurriedly left the room and went down to partake of a last family breakfast, at which Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis were present. Balthazar, being eager to have done with his scientific agony, bade his children adieu and entered the post-chaise with his uncle; the whole family accompanied him to the door. There, when Marguerite had thrown her arms about him in a desperate embrace, to which he replied by whispering in her ear: “You are a good girl, and I shall never bear you any ill-will,” she ran across the courtyard and into the parlor, and there knelt near the spot where her mother had died, and offered up a fervent prayer to God for strength to perform the stern tasks of her new life.

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She was already strengthened by an inward voice which conveyed to her heart the applause of the angels and her mother's thanks, when her sister and brother, with Emmanuel and Pierquin, returned after watching the calèche until they could see it no longer.

"Now, mademoiselle, what do you propose to do?" inquired Pierquin.

"Save the family," she replied simply. "We own nearly thirteen hundred acres at Waignies. It is my purpose to have all the land cleared, to divide it into farms, to build such buildings as are necessary for cultivating it, and to let it; and I believe that, in a few years, with much economy and patience, each one of us," indicating her brother and sister, "will have a farm of four hundred and odd acres, which will yield some day about fifteen thousand francs a year. My brother Gabriel will keep for his share this house and his investment in the Funds. Then some day we will give back to our father his property, freed from all incumbrances, by applying our income to the payment of his debts."

"But, my dear cousin," said the notary, astounded by Marguerite's business understanding and cool, common sense, "you will need more than two hundred thousand francs to clear your land, build

your farms, and buy cattle. Where will you obtain that amount of money?"

"That is where my embarrassments begin," she said, looking alternately at the notary and Monsieur de Solis; "I dare not ask my uncle for it, as he has already deposited the security for my father!"

"You have friends!" exclaimed Pierquin, suddenly realizing that the Demoiselles Claes might still be *more than five-hundred-thousand-franc girls*.

Emmanuel de Solis gazed at Marguerite with emotion, but, unfortunately for himself, Pierquin remained a notary in spite of his enthusiasm, and added:

"I offer you the two hundred thousand francs myself!"

Emmanuel and Marguerite took counsel together with a glance which was a flash of light to Pierquin. Félicie blushed hotly, she was so overjoyed to find her cousin as generous as she would have him. She glanced at her sister, who suddenly divined that, during her absence, the poor girl had allowed herself to be caught by some of Pierquin's hackneyed gallantries.

"You need pay me only five per cent. interest," he added. "You can repay me when you choose, and give me a mortgage on your land. But never fear, you will have to pay out only the actual amount of your contracts, for I will find you good farmers, and will do your business for nothing, in order to be of some assistance to you, like a good kinsman."

Emmanuel made a sign to Marguerite to urge her

to refuse; but she was too busily engaged in watching the changes of expression on her sister's face to notice it. After a pause, she looked at the notary, with an ironical air, and said, of her own motion, to Emmanuel's great delight :

"You are a very generous kinsman, and I expected nothing less from you; but five per cent. interest would delay our freedom too long; I will wait until my brother is of age, and then we will sell his consols."

Pierquin bit his lips; Emmanuel smiled gently.

"Félicie, my dear girl, take Jean back to school, and Martha will go with you," said Marguerite, pointing to her brother. "Jean, my angel, be very good, and don't tear your clothes; we are not rich enough to give you new ones as often as we would like! Off with you, my love, and study hard."

Félicie went out with her brother.

"Cousin," said Marguerite to Pierquin, "and you, monsieur," turning to Monsieur de Solis, "I have no doubt that you came to see my father during my absence? I thank you for that proof of friendship. Doubtless you will do as much for two poor girls who will constantly need advice. Let us have an understanding on the subject.—When I am in town, I shall always be more than pleased to see you; but when Félicie is alone with Josette and Martha, I need not tell you that she must not receive anyone, even an old friend, or the most devoted of our relatives. In our present circumstances, our conduct must be discreet beyond possibility of reproach.

We are doomed to solitude and hard work for a long time to come."

Silence reigned for a few moments. Emmanuel, absorbed in contemplation of Marguerite's face, seemed stricken with dumbness; Pierquin did not know what to say. The notary took leave of his cousin, furious with himself; he had suddenly discovered that Marguerite loved Emmanuel, and that he acted like a downright fool.

"Ah! Pierquin, my boy," he said, apostrophizing himself in the street, "anybody who told you that you were a great booby would be quite right. What a jackass I am! I have an income of twelve thousand francs, outside of my profession, to say nothing of my succession to my uncle Des Racquets, whose only heir I am, and who will double my fortune some day.—I don't want him to die, by the way, for he's a money-saver!—and I am despicable enough to charge Mademoiselle Claes interest! I am perfectly sure that they are laughing together at me now. I needn't think any more of Marguerite! No. After all, Félicie is a sweet, dear little creature, much better suited to me. Marguerite has a will of iron, she would try to rule me, and she would rule me! Come, let us be generous, let us not be quite so much the notary—for Heaven's sake, can't I shake off this harness? Deuce take it! I propose to fall in love with Félicie, and I won't budge from that sentiment!—Deuce take it! she'll have a farm of four hundred and thirty acres, which will be worth between fifteen and twenty thousand francs a year

before long, for it's good land at Waignies. When my uncle Des Racquets dies, poor man! I'll sell my office, and I'll be a fifty-thou-sand-francs-a-year man. My wife being a Claes, I shall be connected with prominent families. *Diantre!* we will see if the Courtevelles, the Magalhens, the Savarons de Savarus, will refuse to visit a Pierquin-Claes-Molina-Nourho! I will be mayor of Douai, I will have the Cross, I may be chosen deputy, I may attain any height.—Ah! Pierquin, my boy, stick to that, no more nonsense, especially as Félicie—Mademoiselle Félicie Van Claes—loves you, on my word of honor!”

When the two lovers were left alone, Emmanuel held out his hand to Marguerite, who could not refrain from putting her right hand in it. They rose, in obedience to a simultaneous impulse, and started to go out to their bench in the garden; but, in the middle of the parlor, the lover was unable to restrain his joy, and, in a voice trembling with emotion, he said to Marguerite:

“I have three hundred thousand francs of yours!”

“What!” she cried, “can it be that my poor mother placed any more money in your hands?—No— What?”

“O my Marguerite, is not what is mine yours? Were not you the first to say *us?*”

“Dear Emmanuel!” she said, pressing the hand which she still held.

And, instead of going into the garden, she threw herself into a chair.

“Is it not my place to thank you, since you accept?” he said in a loving voice.

“This moment, my best beloved,” she answered, “wipes out many sorrows, and brings a happy future nearer! Yes, I accept your fortune,” she continued, while an angelic smile played about her lips, “I know a way to make it mine.”

She glanced at the portrait of Van Claes, as if to invoke a witness. The young man, who was following her glance, did not see her take from her finger a ring, and did not notice her gesture until he heard these words:

“In the midst of our greatest misery, one joy stands forth. My father, through indifference, leaves me free to dispose of myself,” she said, offering him the ring. “Take it, Emmanuel! my mother loved you, she would have chosen you.”

Tears came to Emmanuel’s eyes, he turned pale, fell upon his knees, and said to Marguerite, as he gave her a ring which he always wore:

“This is my mother’s wedding-ring! my own Marguerite,” he added, kissing the ring she had given him, “am I to have no other pledge than this?”

She stooped to put her forehead to Emmanuel’s lips.

“Alas! my poor love, are we not doing something that we ought not to do?” she said, deeply moved; “for we shall have to wait a long while.”

“My uncle used to say that adoration was the daily bread of patience, speaking of the Christian

who loves God; I may love you so, for I have long confounded you with the Lord in all my thoughts; I am yours, as I am His."

They sat for some moments, absorbed in the sweetest, most exalted reflections. It was the sincere and calm outpouring of sentiment which, like a too full spring, overflowed in a constant succession of little waves. The circumstances that separated them were a cause of melancholy which made their joy the keener, imparting to it a something poignant, like pain. Félicie returned too soon for them. Emmanuel, guided by the delicate tact which enables one in love to divine everything, left the two sisters alone, after exchanging a glance with Marguerite in which she could read how much that discretion cost him, for by it he told her how thirsty he was for the happiness he had so long craved, and which had just been sanctified by the betrothal of their hearts.

"Come this way, little sister," said Marguerite, putting her arm around Félicie's neck.

She led her into the garden, and they seated themselves on the bench to which each succeeding generation had confided its words of love, its sighs of sorrow, its meditations, and its projects. Despite her sister's cheerful manner and her amiable, cajoling smile, Félicie felt a sensation which resembled a thrill of fear. Marguerite took her hand and felt that it was trembling.

"Mademoiselle Félicie," she said, putting her lips to her sister's ear, "I can read your heart. Pierquin has been here often during my absence, he has

called every evening, he has said soft words to you and you have listened to them."

Félicie blushed.

"Don't excuse yourself, my angel," continued Marguerite, "it is so natural to love! Perhaps your dear heart will change our cousin's nature a little; he is egotistical, selfish, but he is an honest man, and doubtless his very defects will be of advantage to your happiness. He will love you as the most attractive of his belongings, you will be part of his business. Forgive me for saying that, dear love! you will cure him of the wretched habit he has acquired of seeing nothing but interest anywhere, by giving him instruction in the business of the heart."

Félicie could only embrace her sister.

"Moreover," continued Marguerite, "he is rich. His family belongs to the oldest and most respectable bourgeoisie. Am I the one to stand in the way of your happiness, if you choose to find it in a mediocre station?"

"Dear sister!" ejaculated Félicie.

"Oh! you can confide in me!" cried Marguerite. "What could be more natural than for us to tell each other our secrets?"

Those cordial words led to one of those delightful chats in which girls tell one another everything. When Marguerite, whom love had made expert, realized the state of Félicie's heart, she said to her in conclusion:

"Well, my dear child, let us make sure that our cousin really loves you; and then—"

“Let me alone,” laughed Félicie, “I have my models.”

“Silly girl!” said Marguerite, kissing her on the forehead.

Although Pierquin was one of those men who see in marriage obligations to be undertaken, the execution of the laws of society, and a method of providing for the transmission of property; although it was a matter of indifference to him whether he married Félicie or Marguerite, so long as they bore the same name and had the same dowry, he discovered, nevertheless, that they were both, according to an expression of his, *romantic and sentimental girls*, adjectives which heartless persons employ in scorn of the gifts which nature sows with parsimonious hand in the furrows of mankind; the notary said to himself, doubtless, that he must howl with the wolves, for he went the next day to see Marguerite, led her with an affectation of mystery into the little garden, and began to talk sentiment, that being one of the clauses of the preliminary contract, which, according to the laws of society, must precede the notarial contract.

“Dear cousin,” he said, “we have not always been of the same opinion concerning the methods to be adopted to reach a fortunate adjustment of your affairs; but you must recognize to-day that I have always been guided by an earnest desire to be of service to you. Very well; yesterday, I spoiled my offer of assistance by virtue of a fatal habit due to the *notarial mind*—do you understand? My heart

was not accessory to my stupidity. I have loved you dearly; but we have more or less perspicacity, we lawyers, and I have discovered that I am not attractive to you. It is my own fault! another has been cleverer than I. Very good; I have come to confess to you in all simplicity that I have a genuine affection for your sister Félicie. Look upon me, therefore, as a brother! draw upon my purse, ay, take it! the more you take, the more thoroughly you will prove your friendship for me. I am entirely at your service, *without interest*, you understand—neither at twelve nor at one-quarter per cent. Let me be found worthy of Félicie, and I shall be content. Forgive my faults, they are due entirely to the practice of my profession; my heart is all right, and I would throw myself into the Scarpe rather than fail to make my wife happy.”

“That is as it should be, cousin!” said Marguerite; “but my sister’s fate depends upon herself and our father.”

“I know that, my dear cousin,” rejoined the notary; “but you are the mother of the whole family, and I have nothing more *at heart* than to make you the judge of *mine*.”

This remark is sufficiently illustrative of the worthy notary’s wit. At a later period, Pierquin became famous by reason of his reply to the commanding officer of the camp at Saint-Omer, who had invited him to be present at a military fête; which reply was thus conceived: “Monsieur Pierquin-Claes de Molina-Nourho, mayor of the town of

Douai, chevalier of the Legion of Honor, will have *that** of accepting," etc., etc.

Marguerite accepted the notary's assistance, but only in those matters which concerned his profession, in order to avoid compromising in any way her womanly dignity, or her sister's future, or her father's actions. On that same day, she gave her sister into the charge of Josette and Martha, who were devoted body and soul to their young mistress, and seconded her heartily in her economical plans. Marguerite started at once for Waignies, where she began her operations, which were shrewdly managed by Pierquin. The notary's mind had figured out that devotion to his cousins would be an excellent speculation; his labors, his oversight, were, therefore, in a certain sense, an outlay in which he did not choose to be niggardly.

In the first place, he tried to save Marguerite the trouble of clearing and ploughing the land intended for farming purposes. He thought of three young men, sons of rich farmers, who wished to set up establishments of their own, he allured them by the prospects offered by the fertility of the soil, and succeeded in inducing them to take leases of the three farms which were to be laid out. In consideration of a waiver of rent for three years, the farmers agreed to pay ten thousand francs the fourth year, twelve thousand the sixth, and fifteen thousand during the remainder of the lease, to dig the ditches, to lay out the farms, and to buy the cattle. While the

* That is to say, "the honor."

farm-houses were building, the farmers cleared the stumps from their land.

Four years after Balthazar's departure, Marguerite had almost restored the fortunes of her brother and sister. Two hundred thousand sufficed to erect all the buildings. The brave-hearted girl, whose conduct aroused the admiration of the whole town, lacked neither assistance nor advice. She superintended the construction of her buildings, the execution of her contracts and leases, with the good sense, the energy, the perseverance, which women know how to put forth when they are actuated by a noble sentiment. In the fifth year, she was able to devote the thirty thousand francs yielded by the farms, her brother's consols, and her father's property to a payment on the principal of the mortgages, and to repairing the injury which Balthazar's passion had inflicted on the family. The redemption proceeded rapidly thenceforth by reason of the diminution of the interest. Moreover, Emmanuel de Solis offered Marguerite the hundred thousand remaining to him from his uncle's inheritance, which she did not use at once, but added to it about twenty thousand of her own savings, so that, in the third year of her management, she was able to pay debts to a considerable amount. That life of courage, of privations and devotion, suffered no break for five years; on the contrary, everything was successful and triumphant under Marguerite's administration and influence.

Gabriel, having become an engineer in the Department of Roads and Bridges, assisted by his

granduncle, made his fortune rapidly in managing a canal which he built, and he succeeded in winning the affections of his cousin Mademoiselle Conyncks, who was adored by her father, and was one of the richest heiresses in the two Flanders. In 1824, the Claes property was free from incumbrances, and the family on Rue de Paris had repaired its losses. Pierquin made formal application to Balthazar for Félicie's hand, as Emmanuel de Solis did for Marguerite's.

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Early in January, 1825, Marguerite and Monsieur Conyncks went to bring home the exiled father, whose return was earnestly desired by all, and who had resigned his post in order to end his life in the bosom of his family, whose happiness was about to receive the seal of his sanction. In the absence of Marguerite, who had often expressed her regret at her inability to fill the empty frames in the gallery and reception-rooms, by the day on which her father would resume possession of his house, Pierquin and Monsieur de Solis plotted with Félicie to prepare a surprise for Marguerite, which would enable the younger sister to have a hand, in a certain sense, in the restoration of Claes House. Together they had purchased for Félicie several fine pictures, which they presented to her to adorn her gallery. Monsieur Conyncks had had the same idea. Desirous of testifying to Marguerite the satisfaction he derived from her noble conduct, and her devotion in carrying out the mandate her mother had bequeathed to her, he had taken measures to have some fifty of his finest pictures brought to Douai, together with some of those Balthazar had sold, so that the Claes gallery was entirely refurnished.

Marguerite had already been several times to see her father, accompanied by her sister or by Jean;

each time she had found him more changed; but, since her last visit, old age had made itself manifest in Balthazar by alarming symptoms, to which, doubtless, the parsimonious mode of life adopted by him, to enable him to devote the larger part of his salary to experiments which always betrayed his hopes, had largely contributed. Although he was only sixty-five years old, he had the aspect of an octogenarian. His eyes were deeply imbedded in their sockets, his eyebrows had turned white, he had only a few scanty hairs around the lower part of his head; he had let his beard grow, and cut it with scissors when it got in his way; he was as bent as an old vine-dresser; and the disordered state of his clothes was augmented by a suggestion of poverty which his decrepitude made hideous. Although vigorous thoughts still animated that noble face, whose features could no longer be seen for wrinkles, the fixed stare of the eyes, an expression of desperation, of constant unrest, engraved thereon the indications of insanity, or rather of all forms of insanity together. Sometimes there appeared upon it a gleam of hope which gave Balthazar the aspect of a monomaniac; sometimes impatience at his inability to discover a secret which danced before him like a will-o'-the-wisp, imprinted there the symptoms of raving madness; then a sudden roar of laughter would suggest lunacy; but, most of the time, the most complete prostration would reduce all the gradations of his passion to the lifeless melancholy of the idiot. Fleeting or imperceptible as these indications

may have been to strangers, they were unhappily only too evident to those who once knew a Claes sublime in his kindness and in the noble qualities of his heart, and handsome of face—a Claes of whom only faint traces remained.

Lemulquinier, aged and exhausted, like his master, by constant toil, had not, like him, been forced to undergo the fatigues of thought; so that his face presented a singular mixture of anxiety and admiration for his master, which it was easy to misunderstand; although he listened with all respect to his lightest words, although, too, he followed his slightest movements with a sort of loving affection, he took care of the scientist as a mother takes care of a child; frequently he affected a protecting air, because he did really protect him in respect to the commonplace necessities of life, of which Balthazar never thought. Those two old men, enveloped by a single idea, trusting in the reality of their hope, inspired by the same breath, one representing the outer envelope, the other the soul of their common existence, presented a spectacle at once ghastly and affecting.

When Marguerite and Monsieur Conyncks arrived, they found Claes established at an inn; his successor had not delayed, and had already taken possession of his post. Amid the preoccupations of science, Balthazar had an earnest wish to see his native province, his house, and his family once more; his daughter's letter had described the fortunate turn of affairs; he was thinking of crowning his career by a series of experiments which would surely lead him

at last to the solution of his problem; so he was awaiting Marguerite with excessive impatience.

The young woman threw herself into her father's arms, weeping for joy. She had come this time to seek the reward of a sorrowful life, and forgiveness for her domestic triumph. She felt that she was culpable after the manner of great men who violate the liberties of their fellow-men in order to save their country. But, when she looked at her father, she shuddered as she realized the change that had taken place in him since her last visit. Conyncks shared his niece's secret alarm, and insisted upon taking his cousin away as speedily as possible to Douai, where the influence of his native province might restore him to reason and health, by restoring him to a happy life under his own roof.

After the first outpourings of the heart, which were more earnest on Balthazar's part than Marguerite expected, he was strangely assiduous in his attentions to her: he expressed regret at having to receive her in a wretched room in a public-house, inquired concerning her tastes, and asked her what she would like to eat, with the eager zeal of a lover; in a word, he behaved like a culprit who wishes to make sure of his judge's goodwill. Marguerite knew her father so well that she divined the motive of that display of affection, concluding that he must have divers debts in the town which he wished to pay before taking his departure. She watched her father closely for some time, and saw the human heart laid bare. Balthazar had grown

smaller. The consciousness of his degradation, the isolation due to his passion for science, had made him timid and childish in reference to all matters not connected with his favorite occupations; his oldest daughter awed him; the remembrance of her past devotion, of the strength she had displayed, the consciousness of the authority he had allowed her to assume, the fortune that she had at her disposal, and the indescribable sensations which had taken possession of him from the day when he renounced his already compromised paternal authority, had doubtless magnified her in his eyes from day to day. Conyncks seemed to be of no consequence in Balthazar's eyes, he saw only his daughter, and thought only of her, apparently standing in awe of her as some weak husbands stand in awe of the superior women who have subjugated them; when he raised his eyes to her face, Marguerite was pained to detect in them an expression of dread, like that of a child who is conscious of having been naughty. The noble-hearted girl could not reconcile the majestic and awe-inspiring aspect of that head, ravaged by learning and toil, with the puerile smile, with the ingenuous servility depicted on Balthazar's lips and face. She was hurt by the contrast between that grandeur and that pettiness, and promised herself that she would exert all her influence to restore to her father all his former dignity, for the solemn day when he would reappear in the bosom of his family.

First of all, she took advantage of a moment when they were alone, to whisper:

“Do you owe anything here?”

Balthazar blushed, and replied with an embarrassed air:

“I do not know, but Lemulquinier will tell you. That excellent fellow is better acquainted with my affairs than I am myself.”

Marguerite rang for the valet, and when he came, she studied, almost involuntarily, the faces of the two old men.

“Does monsieur wish anything?” Lemulquinier asked.

Marguerite, who was all pride and high-mindedness, felt her heart sink when she detected in the valet’s tone and manner an indication that a harmful familiarity existed between the master and his companion in work.

“Cannot my father calculate what he owes in this place, without your assistance?” she said.

“Monsieur,” replied Lemulquinier, “owes—”

As he spoke, Balthazar made a sign to him, which Marguerite saw and which humiliated her.

“Tell me the whole amount of what my father owes,” she cried.

“Monsieur owes three or four thousand francs to a wholesale druggist who has supplied us with caustic potash, lead, zinc, and reagents.”

“Is that all?” Marguerite demanded.

Balthazar made an affirmative sign to Lemulquinier, who, as if fascinated by his master, replied:

“Yes, mademoiselle.”

“Very well, I will hand you the money.”

Balthazar joyfully embraced his daughter.

"You are angelic to me, my child," he said; and he breathed more freely, looking at her with a less dejected eye; but, notwithstanding his delight, Marguerite readily detected indications of profound anxiety on his face, and concluded that the three thousand francs was simply the amount of the pressing debts of the laboratory.

"Be frank with me, father," she said, allowing him to take her on his knees, "you owe something more, do you not? Tell me everything, return to your house without retaining a shadow of a cause for dread amid the general rejoicing."

"My dear Marguerite," he replied, taking her hands and kissing them with a courtly grace which seemed to be a souvenir of his youth, "you will not scold me?"

"No," she said.

"Really?" and his face lighted up with an expression of childish glee; "then I can tell you everything, and you will pay?"

"Yes," she said, repressing the tears that rose to her eyes.

"Well, then, I owe— Oh! I dare not—"

"Yes, tell me, father."

"It's a good deal," he replied.

She clasped her hands with a gesture of despair.

"I owe Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville thirty thousand francs."

"Thirty thousand francs is the amount of my

savings; but I am glad to give it to you," she said, kissing his forehead with respect.

He rose, took her in his arms, and walked round and round the room, tossing her up and down like a baby; then he set her down in the chair from which he had taken her, exclaiming:

"My dear child, you are a treasure of love! Life had no pleasures for me. The Chiffrevilles have already written me three threatening letters and are on the point of suing me, me through whom they have made a fortune."

"Father," said Marguerite, sadly, "are you still searching?"

"Still!" he said, with a madman's smile. "I shall find, too! If you knew how near we are!"

"Who are we?"

"I mean Mulquinier; he has finally understood me, and is of great assistance to me.—Poor fellow, he is so devoted to me!"

Conyncks entered the room and interrupted the conversation. Marguerite motioned to her father to be silent, fearing that he would lower himself in her uncle's eyes. She was terrified at the ravages made by his absorbing preoccupation in that powerful intellect, engrossed in the search for the solution of a problem that was probably insoluble. Balthazar, who evidently saw nothing beyond his furnaces, had no suspicion that his property had been cleared of incumbrances.

They started for Flanders the next day. The journey was long enough to enable Marguerite to

obtain a somewhat confused idea of the relative situations of her father and Lemulquinier. Had the valet acquired that ascendancy over his master which uneducated minds are able to acquire over the greatest intellects when they feel that they are necessary to them, and by virtue of which they go on from concession to concession toward absolute domination, with the persistency born of a fixed idea? Or had the master conceived for the valet that species of affection which is born of habit, and resembles the affection of a mechanic for the creative instrument, of an Arab for the steed which bears him to freedom? Marguerite watched closely for facts which would enable her to decide, determined to free Balthazar from a humiliating yoke if it were a real one.

They passed through Paris and tarried there a few days while she paid her father's debts and requested the manufacturers of chemicals to send nothing to Douai without first advising her of her father's orders. She induced her father to change his style of dress and to adopt such habits with regard to his toilet as became a man of his rank. This corporeal rehabilitation imparted to Balthazar a sort of physical dignity which augured well for a change in his habits of thought. Soon his daughter, exulting in anticipation of all the surprises which awaited her father in his own house, started from Paris for Douai.

Three leagues from that town, Balthazar met his daughter Félicie on horseback, escorted by her two

brothers, by Emmanuel, Pierquin, and the intimate friends of the three families. The journey had necessarily led the chemist's mind away from his usual thoughts, and the sight of Flanders had had its effect upon his heart; and so, when he spied the joyous procession formed by his family and his friends, his emotion was so keen that his eyes filled with tears, his eyelids became red, his voice trembled, and he embraced his children so passionately, unable to take his arms from their necks, that the spectators were moved to tears. When his eyes fell upon his house, he turned pale, jumped from the carriage with the agility of a young man, inhaled the air in the courtyard with ecstasy, and began to inspect the most trifling details with a pleasure which overflowed in his gestures; he stood erect, and his face became young once more. When he entered the parlor, his eyes filled with tears as he realized, by the exactness with which his daughter had reproduced his old silver candlesticks, which he had sold, that the family disasters must be entirely repaired.

A splendid breakfast was served in the dining-room, where the sideboards were covered with silverware and curios, at least equal in value to those which had formerly embellished them. Although that family repast lasted a long while, it was hardly long enough for the extended narratives which Balthazar required from each of his children. The shock inflicted upon his mental organization by that home-coming caused him to share the joy of his

family, and he appeared the father in very truth. His manners resumed their former noble dignity. At first, he thought of nothing but the enjoyment of possession, paying no heed to the methods by which he recovered all that he had lost. His pleasure, therefore, was complete and without alloy. The breakfast at an end, the four children, their father, and Pierquin, the notary, adjourned to the parlor, where Balthazar saw, not without some uneasiness, a pile of stamped papers which a clerk had placed on a table beside which he stood, as if to assist his master. The children seated themselves, and Balthazar, in his surprise, remained standing by the fireplace.

“This,” said Pierquin, “is the account of his guardianship rendered by Monsieur Claes to his children. It probably is not a very entertaining document,” he added, laughing after the manner of notaries, who generally assume a jesting tone in which to speak of the most serious affairs, “but it is absolutely necessary that you should listen to me.”

Although the circumstances justified that statement, Monsieur Claes, whose conscience reminded him of his past, accepted it as a reproach and frowned. The clerk began the reading. Balthazar's amazement increased as he proceeded. The document set forth, in the first place, that his wife's fortune at her death amounted to about sixteen hundred thousand francs, and the concluding sentences clearly assigned to each of the children his or her share of the property unimpaired, and as well administered as a kind and generous father could have

administered it. The result was that the house was entirely free from incumbrances, that Balthazar was in every sense at home, and that his property in the country was also free.

When the various documents were signed, Pierquin presented receipts for the sums borrowed, and releases of the mortgages upon the property. Thereupon, Balthazar, who was restored at the same moment to the name of a man of honor, the life of a father, and the consideration of a citizen, sank into a chair; he looked about for Marguerite, who, with the sublime delicacy characteristic of woman, had absented herself during the reading, to see if all her instructions for the fête had been carried out. Every member of the family understood the old man's thought when his eyes, dimmed with tears, asked for his daughter, whom one and all saw at that moment, with the eyes of the soul, as an angel of strength and light. Gabriel went to find her. When he heard his daughter's step, Balthazar ran to meet her, and pressed her to his heart.

"Father," she said to him, at the foot of the stairs, where the old man seized her, "do not, I beg of you, relax in any respect your consecrated authority. Thank me, before the family, for having carried out your intentions, and thus be the sole author of whatever good may have been done here."

Balthazar raised his eyes to heaven, gazed at his daughter, folded his arms, and said, after a pause, during which his face took on an expression which his children had not seen for ten years:

“Why are you not here, Pépita, to admire our child!”

He clasped Marguerite to him, and, unable to utter a word, returned to the parlor.

“My children,” he said, with the noble bearing that made him formerly one of the most imposing of men, “we all owe thanks and gratitude to my daughter Marguerite for the wisdom and courage with which she carried out my intentions and executed my projects, when I, too deeply absorbed in my scientific labors, placed in her hands the reins of our domestic affairs.”

“Well, now we will proceed to read the marriage-contracts,” said Pierquin, glancing at the clock. “But those documents are not within my province, as the law forbids me to act in matters which concern my kindred or myself. Monsieur Raparlier, the uncle, is coming.”

Just then the friends of the family who had been invited to the dinner-party given in commemoration of Monsieur Claes's return, and the signing of the contracts, began to arrive, while their servants brought the wedding-gifts. The party constantly increased in size, and became as imposing by virtue of the quality of the persons comprising it, as it was pleasing to the eye by virtue of the magnificence of the toilets. The three families which were united by the happiness of their children, sought to outdo one another in splendor. In a few moments the parlor was filled with the handsome gifts presented to the betrothed. Gold gleamed and sparkled. The

rich stuffs, the cashmere shawls, the necklaces, the jewels, aroused such heartfelt delight in those who gave and those who received them; that semi-childish glee was so plainly depicted on every face, that the value of the superb gifts was forgotten even by the indifferent guests, who frequently, on such occasions, indulge in calculations from curiosity. Soon the ceremonial which the Claes family was accustomed to follow on these solemn occasions, began. The parents alone were supposed to remain seated, and all the others to stand facing them at a little distance. On the left side of the parlor, toward the garden, stood Gabriel Claes and Mademoiselle Conyncks, and beside them were Monsieur de Solis and Marguerite, Pierquin and Félicie. A few steps from these three couples, Balthazar and Conyncks, the only ones who were entitled to be seated, took their places, each in an armchair, beside the notary who took Pierquin's place. Jean stood behind his father. A score of women beautifully dressed, and a few men, all selected from the nearest relatives of the Pierquins, the Conyncks, and the Claes, the mayor of Douai, who was to perform the marriage-ceremony, the twelve witnesses chosen from among the most intimate friends of the three families, the first president of the Royal Court among the rest,—all, including the curé of Saint-Pierre, stood in an imposing circle on the courtyard side. This homage rendered by that whole assemblage to the paternal authority which, at that moment, shone resplendent with regal majesty, gave to that scene a flavor of

antiquity. It was the only moment in sixteen years when Balthazar forgot the Search for the Absolute.

Monsieur Raparlier, the notary, asked Marguerite and her sister if everybody invited to the signing of the contracts and the dinner which was to follow it had arrived; and, on receiving an affirmative reply from them, he stepped to the table to get the contract between Marguerite and Monsieur de Solis, which was to be read first, when the parlor door was suddenly thrown open and Lemulquinier appeared, his face aflame with joy.

“Monsieur! monsieur!”

Balthazar cast a despairing glance at Marguerite and motioned to her to follow him into the garden. An uneasy feeling at once took possession of the assemblage.

“I did not dare to tell you, my child,” said the father to his daughter, “but, since you have done so much for me, you surely will rescue me from this fresh misfortune. Lemulquinier lent me twenty thousand francs, the fruit of his savings, for one last experiment, which was unsuccessful. Doubtless, the poor fellow has come to ask me for it, learning that I have become rich again; let me have it at once. Oh! my angel, you owe it to your father, for he alone consoled me in my misery, he alone still has faith in me. It is certain that, but for him, I should have died—”

“Monsieur! monsieur!” cried Lemulquinier.

“Well?” said Balthazar, turning back.

“A diamond!”

Claes leaped back into the parlor when he spied a diamond in the hands of his valet, who said to him in an undertone:

“I went to the laboratory—”

The chemist, who had forgotten everything, looked at the old Fleming, and that glance could be translated only by these words: “You went to the laboratory first!”

“And I found this diamond,” continued the valet, “in the retort connected with the battery which we left at work making them; and it made one, monsieur!” he added, exhibiting a white octahedral diamond, whose brilliancy attracted the astonished glance of the whole assemblage.

“My children, my friends,” said Balthazar, “forgive my old servant, forgive me.—This will drive me mad. Chance, in seven years, has produced, without me, a discovery I have been trying to make for sixteen years. How? I have no idea. I left some sulphate of carbon under the influence of a voltaic battery whose action should have been watched every day. Well, during my absence, God’s power has burst forth in my laboratory, and I was not present to observe its effects—gradual effects, of course! Is it not horrible? Accursed exile! Accursed luck! Alas! if I had watched that long, slow, sudden crystallization, transformation,—I don’t know what to call it,—that miracle, why, my children would be even richer than they are. Although this is not the solution of the problem I am investigating, at least the first rays of my

renown would have shone upon my country, and this moment, which our mutual affection renders so immeasurably happy, would be made still more ardent by the sun of science!"

Everyone held his peace before that man. The incoherent words extorted from him by grief were too genuine not to be sublime.

Suddenly he forced back his despair to the very depths of his being, bestowed upon the assembled company a majestic glance which went to their very souls, took the diamond, and offered it to Marguerite, saying:

"It belongs to you, my angel."

Then he dismissed Lemulquinier with a gesture, and said to the notary:

"Let us proceed."

That remark sent such a thrill through the assemblage as Talma used to send through the spell-bound audience in certain rôles. Balthazar had resumed his seat, saying to himself in an undertone:

"I must be the father to-day, and nothing else."

Marguerite overheard the words, walked to where he sat, took his hand, and kissed it respectfully.

"Never was a man so great," said Emmanuel, when his fiancée returned to him, "never was a man so self-controlled; any other would have gone mad."

The three contracts being duly read and signed, everyone eagerly questioned Balthazar concerning the substance of which the diamond was composed; but he could give no information concerning such an

extraordinary accident. He looked toward his garret, and pointed to it with a frantic gesture.

“Yes, the awful power produced by the combustion of the inflammable matter, which no doubt makes metals and diamonds,” he said, “made itself manifest for an instant, by chance.”

“Probably that same chance is the most natural thing in the world,” said one of those people who try to explain everything; “I suppose the goodman left a real diamond there and forgot it. It’s just so much saved from what he has thrown away—”

“Let us forget this incident,” said Balthazar to his friends; “I beg you not to mention it to me again to-day.”

Marguerite took her father’s arm to go to the reception-rooms of the house on the street, where a superb entertainment was in readiness. When he entered the gallery after all his guests, he saw that it was fully furnished with pictures and filled with rare flowers.

“Pictures!” he cried, “pictures! and some of the old ones!”

He stopped, his brow grew dark, a wave of sadness passed over him, and he felt the full burden of his sins as he measured the depth of his secret humiliation.

“They are all yours, father,” said Marguerite, divining the thoughts by which his mind was torn.

“Angel whom the heavenly spirits should applaud,” he cried, “how many times have you renewed your father’s life!”

THE RESULT OF CHANCE

“My children, my friends,” said Balthazar, “forgive my old servant, forgive me.—This will drive me mad. Chance, in seven years, has produced, without me, a discovery I have been trying to make for sixteen years. How? I have no idea.”



ADRIEN MOREAU.

“Let no cloud remain on your brow, nor the faintest sad thought in your heart,” she replied, “and you will have rewarded me beyond my hopes. I have just been thinking about Lemulquinier, my dearest father; the few words you told me about him have raised him in my esteem, and I confess that I have judged him wrongly; think no more of what you owe him, he shall remain with you as a humble friend. Emmanuel has about sixty thousand francs that he has saved, we will give it to Lemulquinier. After serving you so faithfully, the man must be made happy for the rest of his days. Don’t be alarmed about us! Monsieur de Solis and I have a calm, happy life before us, a life without show; so that we can do without that money until you repay it.”

“Ah! my child, never desert me! be your father’s Providence always!”

On entering the reception-rooms, Balthazar found them completely restored, and as magnificently furnished as they had ever been. Soon the guests went down to the large dining-room on the ground-floor by the main stairway, on each stair of which were flowering shrubs. A service of silver, of wonderfully beautiful workmanship, presented by Gabriel to his father, exerted a no less potent charm on the eye than the table appointments, whose magnificence was a source of wonderment to the principal inhabitants of a town where magnificence in that respect is traditionally fashionable. Monsieur Coyncks’s servants and Pierquin’s, as well as those of

the family, were in attendance to serve the sumptuous repast. Finding himself in the centre of that table surrounded by kinsmen, friends, and faces alight with lively and sincere joy, Balthazar, behind whom stood Lemulquinier, was visibly affected by such poignant emotion that everyone was silent, as one naturally is silent in the presence of great joys or great sorrows.

“Dear children,” he cried, “you have killed the fatted calf for the return of the prodigal father!”

Those words, in which the scientist pronounced judgment upon himself, and thereby perhaps prevented others from a more severe judgment upon him, were spoken so nobly that everyone who heard them was deeply touched, and wiped the tears from his eyes; but it was the last trace of melancholy, the rejoicing insensibly assumed the noisy and animated character peculiar to family festivities. After the dinner, the leading people of the town arrived for the ball, which was at once opened, and which was on a par with the classic splendor of the restored Claes House.

The three marriages were speedily celebrated, and were made the occasion of fêtes, balls, and banquets which kept old Claes revolving in the eddies of society for several months. His eldest son settled on the estate near Cambrai owned by Conyncks, who did not wish to be parted from his daughter while he lived. Madame Pierquin also left her father's house to preside over the mansion which Pierquin had built, and where he proposed to live

handsomely, for his office was sold, and his uncle Des Racquets had died, leaving him a hoard amassed slowly by saving. Jean went to Paris, where he was to finish his education.

Only Monsieur and Madame de Solis remained with their father, who gave up to them the house in the rear, taking up his own quarters on the second floor of the house on the street. Marguerite continued to watch over Balthazar's material welfare, and was assisted in that pleasant task by Emmanuel. That noble maiden received at the hands of love the most envied of wreaths, that which happiness weaves, and whose freshness is maintained by constancy. In very truth, never did man and wife present a lovelier image of that perfect, pure, confessed felicity of which all women fondly dream. The union of those two, who had borne so bravely the trials of life, and had loved each other with such a holy love, aroused respectful admiration in the town. Monsieur de Solis, long since appointed inspector-general to the University, resigned his post in order to enjoy his happiness the more thoroughly, and to remain at Douai, where everyone praised so heartily his talents and his character, that his name was certain to be put forward for the suffrages of the electors, when he should reach the requisite age for a deputy. Marguerite, who had displayed such strength of character in adversity, became once more a sweet and lovely woman in prosperity.

During that year, Claes was beyond all question

seriously preoccupied; but, although he made inexpensive experiments, the cost of which did not exceed his means, he seemed to neglect his laboratory. Marguerite re-established the former customs of Claes House; she gave a family party for her father every month, at which the Pierquins and Conyncks were always present, and received the first society of the town, one day in each week, at a *coffee-party*, which became one of the most celebrated functions in Douai. Although he was often distraught, Claes appeared at all the parties, and so willingly resumed his position as a society man to please his oldest daughter, that his children were justified in believing that he had abandoned forever the attempt to solve his problem.

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Three years passed in this way.

In 1828, an event of interest to Emmanuel summoned him to Spain. Although there were three numerous branches of the family between the Solis property and himself, yellow fever, old age, sterility, all the caprices of chance, conspired to make Emmanuel the last heir to the titles and valuable entailed estates of his family. By one of those freaks of fortune which are improbable only in books, the Solis family had acquired the countship of Nourho. Marguerite was not willing to part from her husband, who was to remain in Spain as long as the settlement of his affairs required; she was curious, moreover, to see the castle of Casa-Real, where her mother had passed her infancy, and the city of Granada, the patrimonial cradle of the Solis family. She left Douai, entrusting the management of the house to the devotion of Martha, Josette, and Lemulquinier, who were familiar with her methods. Balthazar, to whom Marguerite had suggested that he make the journey with them, declined on the ground of his advanced age; but several experiments which he had long meditated, and which were to bring his hopes to fruition, were the real reason of his refusal.

The count and countess of Solis y Nourho remained in Spain longer than they intended. Marguerite gave birth to a child there. In the summer

of 1830, they were at Cadiz, whence they intended to return to France by way of Italy; but there they received a letter from Félicie, containing melancholy news. In eighteen months their father had ruined himself utterly. Gabriel and Pierquin were obliged to allow Lemulquinier a certain sum monthly to defray the household expenses. The old servant had again sacrificed his fortune to his master. Balthazar would see no one, he would not even admit his children to his house. Josette and Martha were dead. The coachman, the cook, and the other servants had been dismissed one after another. The horses and carriages were sold. Although Lemulquinier preserved the utmost secrecy concerning his master's habits, it was fair to suppose that the thousand francs a month contributed by Gabriel and Pierquin were used for experiments. The scanty supplies which the valet purchased at the market led them to believe that those two old men contented themselves with what was absolutely necessary. Lastly, in order that the paternal house might not be sold, Gabriel and Pierquin were paying the interest on the money Claes had borrowed upon it without their knowledge. No one of his children had the slightest influence on the old man, who, at seventy years, displayed an extraordinary amount of energy in carrying out all his wishes, no matter how absurd they might be. Marguerite alone might possibly resume the power she had formerly exerted over Balthazar, and Félicie begged her sister to return speedily; she feared that her father might have signed some notes.

Gabriel, Conyncks, and Pierquin, dismayed at the persistence of a mania which had devoured about seven millions without result, had decided not to pay his debts.

That letter caused a change in Marguerite's plans, and she started at once for Douai by the shortest route. Her savings and her new fortune would enable her to pay her father's debts once more; but she wished to do more than that, she wished to obey her mother and not allow Balthazar to go down into the grave in disgrace. Certainly none but she could exert sufficient influence over that old man to prevent him from continuing his work of destruction, at an age when no valuable results could be expected from his weakened faculties. But she wished to guide him without hurting him, in order not to imitate Sophocles's children, in case her father were really approaching the scientific goal to which he had sacrificed so much.

Monsieur and Madame de Solis reached Flanders in the latter part of September, 1831, and arrived at Douai in the morning. Marguerite ordered her carriage to stop at her house on Rue de Paris and found it closed. No one answered the violent ringing of the bell. A tradesman left the doorway of his shop, to which he had been attracted by the rumbling of the carriages of Monsieur de Solis and his suite. Many people were at their windows to feast their eyes on the spectacle of the return of a family beloved throughout the town, and drawn thither also by a vague curiosity concerning the events to which

Marguerite's arrival was likely to lead in Claes House.

The tradesman told the Comte de Solis's servant that Monsieur Claes had gone out about an hour before. Doubtless, Lemulquinier was taking his master out for an airing on the ramparts. Marguerite sent for a locksmith to open the door, in order to avoid the scene likely to be caused by her father's refusal to admit her, if, as Félicie had written, he should so refuse. Meanwhile, Emmanuel went in search of the old man to tell him of his daughter's arrival, while his servant ran to inform Monsieur and Madame Pierquin.

The door was opened in a moment. Marguerite entered the parlor to superintend the placing of her luggage, and shuddered with dismay when she saw that the walls were as bare as if fire had devastated them. The beautiful wainscoting carved by Van Huisium and the portrait of the president had been sold, to Lord Spencer, it was said. The dining-room was stripped: there was nothing left there but two straw chairs and a common table on which Marguerite saw, with horror, two plates, two bowls, two silver covers, and on a platter the remains of a red herring, of which Claes and his servant had evidently just partaken. In an instant she ran over all the house, where every room presented a picture of nakedness and desolation like the parlor and dining-room. The idea of the Absolute had passed everywhere like a conflagration. Her father's bedroom had no other furniture than a bed, a chair, and a table whereon

stood a wretched copper candlestick with a bit of candle of the cheapest sort burned down to the socket. The dismantling was so complete that there were no curtains at the windows. The most trivial objects of any possible value in the house, everything, even to the cooking utensils, had been sold. Impelled by the curiosity which never abandons us even in misfortune, Marguerite entered Lemulquinier's room, which was as bare as his master's. In the half-open table drawer, she saw a pawnbroker's ticket which attested the fact that the servant had pawned his watch a few days before. She hurried to the laboratory, and found that room filled with scientific apparatus as in the past. She opened the door of her own apartment—there her father had respected everything!

At the first glance she cast about the room, Marguerite burst into tears, and forgave her father all. Even amid his devastating frenzy, he had been checked by his fatherly love, and by the gratitude he owed his daughter! That proof of affection, received at the very moment that Marguerite's despair was at its height, caused one of those mental reactions against which the coldest hearts are powerless. She went down to the parlor and awaited her father's arrival there, in a state of anxiety made immeasurably more poignant by doubt. In what condition should she find him? Wrecked, decrepit, ill, enfeebled by the fasting he imposed upon himself through pride? And would he have his reason? Tears flowed from her eyes unheeded at the thought

of that devastated sanctuary. The memories of her whole life, her struggles, her fruitless precautions, her childhood, her mother, happy and unhappy, everything, even the sight of her little Joseph smiling at that spectacle of desolation, helped to compose a poem of heart-rending, melancholy strains. But, although she had a presentiment of misery to come, she was far from anticipating the catastrophe which was to crown her father's life, that life at once so grand and so miserable.

Monsieur Claes's condition was a secret to nobody. To the shame of mankind, there were not in all Douai two noble hearts to do honor to the perseverance of a man of genius. In the view of society as a whole, Balthazar was a man to be tabooed, a wicked father who had squandered six fortunes, millions, and who was seeking the philosopher's stone in the nineteenth century, this enlightened century, this incredulous century, this century of—etc., etc. They spoke ill of him, branding him with the name of alchemist, throwing in his face the sneer: "He is trying to make gold!" What extravagant eulogies are pronounced upon this century, in which, as in so many others, talent expires beneath an indifference as brutal as that of the days when Dante died, and Cervantes and Tasso *e tutti quanti!* Nations are even slower than kings in comprehending the creations of genius.

These opinions had gradually found their way from the aristocratic society to the bourgeoisie, and from the bourgeoisie to the lowest orders of the

people. The septuagenarian chemist aroused, therefore, a profound feeling of pity in well-bred people, and a mocking curiosity among the vulgar, two sentiments pregnant with contempt, with that *Vix victis!* with which great men are overwhelmed by the masses when they see that they are down. Many people passed Claes House to look at the rose-window under the eaves where so much gold and carbon had been consumed. When Balthazar passed, people pointed their fingers at him; often, at sight of him, a sneer or a word of pity came from the lips of a man of the people or a child; but Lemulquinier took pains to translate it as a word of praise, and could deceive him with impunity. Although Balthazar's eyes had retained that sublime lucidity which the habit of thinking great thoughts imparts, his sense of hearing was weakened. In the eyes of many peasants, and of vulgar and superstitious folk, that old man was a sorcerer. The noble, the majestic Claes House was called in the suburbs and in the country districts the devil's house. Everything, even Lemulquinier's face, tended to confirm the ridiculous ideas that were current concerning his master. So, when the poor slave went to market to buy the supplies necessary for their subsistence, which he selected from the poorest and cheapest, he obtained nothing without a few insults thrown in as a makeweight; indeed, he was fortunate if some superstitious dealer did not refuse to sell him his meagre pittance, afraid of damning himself by having any dealings with an imp of hell.

The general sentiment of the whole town, therefore, was hostile to that old man and his companion. The disordered dress of both augmented the hostility, for they went about clothed like the shamefaced poor who preserve a decent exterior and hesitate to ask alms. Sooner or later, the two old men were certain to be publicly insulted. Pierquin, feeling keenly how disgraceful such an outcome would be to the family, always sent two or three of his people, when his father-in-law went out to walk, to follow him at a distance and protect him, for the Revolution of July had not contributed to make the common people respectful.

By one of those fatalities which it is impossible to explain, Claes and Lemulquinier, having gone out early in the morning, had defeated the secret oversight of Monsieur and Madame Pierquin, and were alone on the streets. On returning from their walk, they sat down in the sun on a bench on Place Saint-Jacques, where several children were passing on their way to school. Perceiving at a distance those two defenceless old men, whose faces beamed in the sunshine, the children commenced to chatter. Ordinarily, the chatter of children soon changes to laughter; from laughter they go on to practical jokes, not knowing how cruel they are. Seven or eight of the first who arrived held aloof and scrutinized the two aged figures, restraining stifled laughter, which attracted Lemulquinier's attention.

“I say, do you see that one with a head just like a knee?”

"Yes."

"Well, he's a scholar by birth."

"Papa says he makes gold," said another.

"Where? There or here?" added a third, indicating slyly that part of his body to which school-boys so often point in token of contempt.

The smallest of the band, who had his basket full of provisions, and was sucking a slice of buttered bread, walked innocently to the bench and said to Lemulquinier:

"Is it true, monsieur, that you make pearls and diamonds?"

"Yes, my little trooper," Lemulquinier replied, smiling and patting his cheek; "we'll give you some when you have learned a lot."

"Oh! give me some, too, monsieur!" they all exclaimed in chorus.

They ran up like a flock of birds and surrounded the two chemists. Balthazar, aroused by their cries from the meditation in which he was absorbed, made an astonished gesture which caused a general laugh.

"Hush, you little rascals, respect a great man!" said Lemulquinier.

"Listen to the jack-pudding!" cried the children. "You're sorcerers. Yes, sorcerers! old sorcerers! sorcerers!"

Lemulquinier rose and shook his cane at the children, who fled, picking up mud and stones. A workman, who was eating his lunch a few steps away, seeing Lemulquinier raise his cane to drive

the children away, thought that he had struck them, and espoused their cause with the ominous words:

“Down with the sorcerers!”

The children, finding that they were supported, threw their projectiles, some of which struck the two old men, just as the Comte de Solis appeared at the corner of the square, accompanied by Pierquin's servants. They did not arrive in time to prevent the children from covering the grand old man and his servant with mud. The blow was dealt. Balthazar, whose faculties had been preserved thus far by the purity natural to great scientists, who are so engrossed by their preoccupation that their passions are deadened, divined, by the phenomenon of intus-susception, the secret significance of that scene. His decrepit body could not withstand the terrible reaction which he underwent in his sentiments, he fell, stricken with paralysis, into the arms of Lemulquinier, who carried him home on a litter, escorted by his two sons-in-law and their servants. No power could deter the populace of Douai from attending the old man to the door of his house, where Félicie and her children, Jean, Marguerite, and Gabriel were assembled, the latter having come from Cambrai with his wife on receipt of a line from his sister.

It was a heart-rending spectacle, the home-coming of that old man, struggling not so much against death as against the horror of having his children discover the secret of his poverty. A bed was at once set up in the centre of the parlor, and loving care was

lavished on Balthazar, whose condition toward the close of the day gave them some hope of preserving his life. The paralysis, although skilfully combated, left him for a long while in a state bordering closely upon dotage. After it had gradually left the other parts of his body, it continued to affect his tongue, which it had attacked with especial severity, perhaps because the old man's wrath had concentrated all his strength at that point when he was about to harangue the children.

This episode aroused general indignation throughout the town. By virtue of a law, hitherto unknown, which guides the affections of the masses, it brought all hearts back to Monsieur Claes. In an instant he became a great man, he aroused the admiration and attracted all the sentiments which had been withheld from him the day before. Everyone exalted his patience, his firm will, his courage, his genius. The magistrates were determined to deal severely with those who had taken part in the assault; but the harm was done. The Claes family were the first to ask that the affair might be allowed to drop.

Marguerite had given orders for furnishing the parlor, where the bare walls were soon hung with silk. When, a few days after this incident, the old father had recovered his faculties, and found himself in a luxurious apartment, surrounded by every essential of a happy life, he tried to say that his daughter Marguerite must have returned, just at the moment that she entered the parlor. When he saw her, Balthazar blushed, his eyes grew moist,

although no tears flowed from them. He was able to press his daughter's hand with his cold fingers, and in that pressure he put all the sentiments and all the ideas which he could no longer express in words. There was something sacred and solemn in that farewell of the brain which still lived, of the heart revived by gratitude.

Exhausted by his fruitless efforts, wearied by his struggle with a gigantic problem, and, it may be, in despair at the thought of the oblivion which awaited his memory, that giant was ere long to cease to live; all his children surrounded him with respectful affection, so that his eyes were refreshed by images of plenty and of wealth, and by the touching picture presented by his lovely family. He invariably manifested the deepest affection in his glances, by which alone he was able to express his feelings: his eyes suddenly contracted such a great variety of expressions that they had a sort of language of light, easy to understand.

Marguerite paid her father's debts, and in a few days restored to Claes House a modern splendor which precluded all idea of decadence. She never left Balthazar's bedside, and exerted herself to divine his every thought and to fulfil his slightest wish. Several months passed in the alternations of better and worse which in old men accompany the struggle between life and death. Every morning his children went to him, remained in the parlor throughout the day, dining by his bedside, and did not leave him until he went to sleep. Of all the forms of

diversion to which they resorted to amuse him, the one that gave him most pleasure was the reading of the newspapers, which were at that time made very interesting by the political situation. Monsieur Claes listened attentively while Monsieur de Solis read them aloud beside his bed.

Late in the year 1832, Balthazar passed an extremely critical night, during which Monsieur Pierquin, the doctor, was summoned by the nurse, who was alarmed by a sudden change in the patient's condition; and the doctor decided to pass the rest of the night with him, fearing every moment that he would expire in the throes of an internal paroxysm, the effects of which resembled the death-agony.

The old man struggled with incredible strength to shake off the bonds of paralysis; he tried to speak, and moved his tongue, but could make no sound; his flaming eyes shot forth thoughts; his distorted features expressed the most intense agony; his fingers moved convulsively; the sweat stood in beads on his forehead. In the morning, the children came to embrace their father with that affection which the fear that his death was near at hand made them lavish upon him with more intense ardor every day; but he did not manifest the satisfaction which those tokens of affection usually caused him. Emmanuel, at Pierquin's suggestion, made haste to open the newspaper, to see if by reading he could not relieve the internal agony by which Balthazar was afflicted. As he unfolded the paper, he saw the words: *Discovery of the Absolute*, which startled him, and he

read to Marguerite an article concerning a lawsuit relative to the sale of the Absolute, by a celebrated Polish mathematician. Though Emmanuel read the heading in a low voice to Marguerite, who requested him to omit the article, Balthazar overheard him.

Suddenly the dying man raised himself on his hands, cast upon his terrified children a glance that blinded them like a flash of lightning, the fringe of hair around his head moved, his wrinkles quivered, his face was lighted with a spiritual flame, and a breath passed over that face and made it sublime; he raised one hand, clenched in fury, and cried in a voice of thunder the famous word of Archimedes: EUREKA!—*I have found!*—He fell back upon his bed with the dull thud of a lifeless body; he died uttering a ghastly groan, and his distorted eyes expressed, up to the moment that the physician closed them, his regret that he had not been able to bequeath to science this solution of an enigma from which the veil was torn away too late by the fleshless fingers of death.

§ Paris, June—September 1834.

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