

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE MUSE OF THE
DEPARTMENT

Оноре де Бальзак

The Muse of the Department

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Honoré de Balzac

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DEDICATION

To Monsieur le Comte Ferdinand de Gramont.

*MY DEAR FERDINAND, – If the chances of the world of literature —habent sua fata libelli— should allow these lines to be an enduring record, that will still be but a trifle in return for the trouble you have taken – you, the Hozier, the Cherin, the King-at-Arms of these Studies of Life; you, to whom the Navarreins, Cadignans, Langeais, Blamont-Chauvrys, Chaulieus, Arthez, Esgrignons, Mortsauufs, Valois – the hundred great names that form the Aristocracy of the “Human Comedy” owe their lordly mottoes and ingenious armorial bearings. Indeed, “the Armorial of the Etudes, devised by Ferdinand de Gramont, gentleman,” is a complete manual of French Heraldry, in which nothing is forgotten, not even the arms of the Empire, and I shall preserve it as a monument of friendship and of Benedictine patience. What profound knowledge of the old feudal spirit is to be seen in the motto of the Beauseants, *Pulchre sedens, melius agens*; in that of the Espards, *Des partem leonis*; in that of the Vandenesses, *Ne se vend*. And what elegance in the thousand details of the learned symbolism which will always show how far accuracy has been carried in my work, to which you, the poet, have contributed.*

Your old friend,

DE BALZAC.

THE MUSE OF THE DEPARTMENT

On the skirts of Le Berry stands a town which, watered by the Loire, infallibly attracts the traveler's eye. Sancerre crowns the topmost height of a chain of hills, the last of the range that gives variety to the Nivernais. The Loire floods the flats at the foot of these slopes, leaving a yellow alluvium that is extremely fertile, excepting in those places where it has deluged them with sand and destroyed them forever, by one of those terrible risings which are also incidental to the Vistula – the Loire of the northern coast.

The hill on which the houses of Sancerre are grouped is so far from the river that the little river-port of Saint-Thibault thrives on the life of Sancerre. There wine is shipped and oak staves are landed, with all the produce brought from the upper and lower Loire. At the period when this story begins the suspension bridges at Cosne and at Saint-Thibault were already built. Travelers from Paris to Sancerre by the southern road were no longer ferried across the river from Cosne to Saint-Thibault; and this of itself is enough to show that the great cross-shuffle of 1830 was a thing of the past, for the House of Orleans has always had a care for substantial improvements, though somewhat after the fashion of a husband who makes his wife presents out of her marriage portion.

Excepting that part of Sancerre which occupies the little plateau, the streets are more or less steep, and the town is surrounded by slopes known as the Great Ramparts, a name which shows that they are the highroads of the place.

Outside the ramparts lies a belt of vineyards. Wine forms the chief industry and the most important trade of the country, which yields several vintages of high-class wine full of aroma, and so nearly resembling the wines of Burgundy, that the vulgar palate is deceived. So Sancerre finds in the wineshops of Paris the quick market indispensable for liquor that will not keep for more than seven or eight years. Below the town lie a few villages, Fontenoy and Saint-Satur, almost suburbs, reminding us by their situation of the smiling vineyards about Neuchatel in Switzerland.

The town still bears much of its ancient aspect; the streets are narrow and paved with pebbles carted up from the Loire. Some old houses are to be seen there. The citadel, a relic of military power and feudal times, stood one of the most terrible sieges of our religious wars, when French Calvinists far outdid the ferocious Cameronians of Walter Scott's tales.

The town of Sancerre, rich in its greater past, but widowed now of its military importance, is doomed to an even less glorious future, for the course of trade lies on the right bank of the Loire. The sketch here given shows that Sancerre will be left more and more lonely in spite of the two bridges connecting it with Cosne.

Sancerre, the pride of the left bank, numbers three thousand five hundred inhabitants at most, while at Cosne there are now more than six thousand. Within half a century the part played by these two towns standing opposite each other has been reversed. The advantage of situation, however, remains with the historic town, whence the view on every side is perfectly enchanting, where the air is deliciously pure, the vegetation splendid, and the residents, in harmony with nature, are friendly souls, good fellows, and devoid of Puritanism, though two-thirds of the population are Calvinists. Under such conditions, though there are the usual disadvantages of life in a small town, and each one lives under the officious eye which makes private life almost a public concern, on the other hand, the spirit of township – a sort of patriotism, which cannot indeed take the place of a love of home – flourishes triumphantly.

Thus the town of Sancerre is exceedingly proud of having given birth to one of the glories of modern medicine, Horace Bianchon, and to an author of secondary rank, Etienne Lousteau, one of our most successful journalists. The district included under the municipality of Sancerre, distressed at finding itself practically ruled by seven or eight large landowners, the wire-pullers of the elections, tried to shake off the electoral yoke of a creed which had reduced it to a rotten borough. This little

conspiracy, plotted by a handful of men whose vanity was provoked, failed through the jealousy which the elevation of one of them, as the inevitable result, roused in the breasts of the others. This result showed the radical defect of the scheme, and the remedy then suggested was to rally round a champion at the next election, in the person of one of the two men who so gloriously represented Sancerre in Paris circles.

This idea was extraordinarily advanced for the provinces, for since 1830 the nomination of parochial dignitaries has increased so greatly that real statesmen are becoming rare indeed in the lower chamber.

In point of fact, this plan, of very doubtful outcome, was hatched in the brain of the Superior Woman of the borough, *dux femina fasti*, but with a view to personal interest. This idea was so widely rooted in this lady's past life, and so entirely comprehended her future prospects, that it can scarcely be understood without some sketch of her antecedent career.

Sancerre at that time could boast of a Superior Woman, long misprized indeed, but now, about 1836, enjoying a pretty extensive local reputation. This, too, was the period at which two Sancerrois in Paris were attaining, each in his own line, to the highest degree of glory for one, and of fashion for the other. Etienne Lousteau, a writer in reviews, signed his name to contributions to a paper that had eight thousand subscribers; and Bianchon, already chief physician to a hospital, Officer of the Legion of Honor, and member of the Academy of Sciences, had just been made a professor.

If it were not that the word would to many readers seem to imply a degree of blame, it might be said that George Sand created *Sandism*, so true is it that, morally speaking, all good has a reverse of evil. This leprosy of sentimentality would have been charming. Still, *Sandism* has its good side, in that the woman attacked by it bases her assumption of superiority on feelings scorned; she is a blue-stocking of sentiment; and she is rather less of a bore, love to some extent neutralizing literature. The most conspicuous result of George Sand's celebrity was to elicit the fact that France has a perfectly enormous number of superior women, who have, however, till now been so generous as to leave the field to the Marechal de Saxe's granddaughter.

The Superior Woman of Sancerre lived at La Baudraye, a town-house and country-house in one, within ten minutes of the town, and in the village, or, if you will, the suburb of Saint-Satur. The La Baudrayes of the present day have, as is frequently the case, thrust themselves in, and are but a substitute for those La Baudrayes whose name, glorious in the Crusades, figured in the chief events of the history of Le Berry.

The story must be told.

In the time of Louis XIV. a certain sheriff named Milaud, whose forefathers had been furious Calvinists, was converted at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. To encourage this movement in one of the strong-holds of Calvinism, the King gave said Milaud a good appointment in the "Waters and Forests," granted him arms and the title of Sire (or Lord) de la Baudraye, with the fief of the old and genuine La Baudrayes. The descendants of the famous Captain la Baudraye fell, sad to say, into one of the snares laid for heretics by the new decrees, and were hanged – an unworthy deed of the great King's.

Under Louis XV. Milaud de la Baudraye, from being a mere squire, was made Chevalier, and had influence enough to obtain for his son a cornet's commission in the Musketeers. This officer perished at Fontenoy, leaving a child, to whom King Louis XVI. subsequently granted the privileges, by patent, of a farmer-general, in remembrance of his father's death on the field of battle.

This financier, a fashionable wit, great at charades, capping verses, and posies to Chlora, lived in society, was a hanger-on to the Duc de Nivernais, and fancied himself obliged to follow the nobility into exile; but he took care to carry his money with him. Thus the rich *emigre* was able to assist more than one family of high rank.

In 1800, tired of hoping, and perhaps tired of lending, he returned to Sancerre, bought back La Baudraye out of a feeling of vanity and imaginary pride, quite intelligible in a sheriff's grandson,

though under the consulate his prospects were but slender; all the more so, indeed, because the ex-farmer-general had small hopes of his heir's perpetuating the new race of La Baudraye.

Jean Athanase Polydore Milaud de la Baudraye, his only son, more than delicate from his birth, was very evidently the child of a man whose constitution had early been exhausted by the excesses in which rich men indulge, who then marry at the first stage of premature old age, and thus bring degeneracy into the highest circles of society. During the years of the emigration Madame de la Baudraye, a girl of no fortune, chosen for her noble birth, had patiently reared this sallow, sickly boy, for whom she had the devoted love mothers feel for such changeling creatures. Her death – she was a Casteran de la Tour – contributed to bring about Monsieur de la Baudraye's return to France.

This Lucullus of the Milauds, when he died, left his son the fief, stripped indeed of its fines and dues, but graced with weathercocks bearing his coat-of-arms, a thousand louis-d'or – in 1802 a considerable sum of money – and certain receipts for claims on very distinguished *emigres* enclosed in a pocketbook full of verses, with this inscription on the wrapper, *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*.

Young La Baudraye did not die, but he owed his life to habits of monastic strictness; to the economy of action which Fontenelle preached as the religion of the invalid; and, above all, to the air of Sancerre and the influence of its fine elevation, whence a panorama over the valley of the Loire may be seen extending for forty leagues.

From 1802 to 1815 young La Baudraye added several plots to his vineyards, and devoted himself to the culture of the vine. The Restoration seemed to him at first so insecure that he dared not go to Paris to claim his debts; but after Napoleon's death he tried to turn his father's collection of autographs into money, though not understanding the deep philosophy which had thus mixed up I O U's and copies of verses. But the winegrower lost so much time in impressing his identity on the Duke of Navarreins "and others," as he phrased it, that he came back to Sancerre, to his beloved vintage, without having obtained anything but offers of service.

The Restoration had raised the nobility to such a degree of lustre as made La Baudraye wish to justify his ambitions by having an heir. This happy result of matrimony he considered doubtful, or he would not so long have postponed the step; however, finding himself still above ground in 1823, at the age of forty-three, a length of years which no doctor, astrologer, or midwife would have dared to promise him, he hoped to earn the reward of his sober life. And yet his choice showed such a lack of prudence in regard to his frail constitution, that the malicious wit of a country town could not help thinking it must be the result of some deep calculation.

Just at this time His Eminence, Monseigneur the Archbishop of Bourges, had converted to the Catholic faith a young person, the daughter of one of the citizen families, who were the first upholders of Calvinism, and who, thanks to their obscurity or to some compromise with Heaven, had escaped from the persecutions under Louis XIV. The Piedefers – a name that was obviously one of the quaint nicknames assumed by the champions of the Reformation – had set up as highly respectable cloth merchants. But in the reign of Louis XVI., Abraham Piedefer fell into difficulties, and at his death in 1786 left his two children in extreme poverty. One of them, Tobie Piedefer, went out to the Indies, leaving the pittance they had inherited to his elder brother. During the Revolution Moise Piedefer bought up the nationalized land, pulled down abbeys and churches with all the zeal of his ancestors, oddly enough, and married a Catholic, the only daughter of a member of the Convention who had perished on the scaffold. This ambitious Piedefer died in 1819, leaving a little girl of remarkable beauty. This child, brought up in the Calvinist faith, was named Dinah, in accordance with the custom in use among the sect, of taking their Christian names from the Bible, so as to have nothing in common with the Saints of the Roman Church.

Mademoiselle Dinah Piedefer was placed by her mother in one of the best schools in Bourges, that kept by the Demoiselles Chamarolles, and was soon as highly distinguished for the qualities of her mind as for her beauty; but she found herself snubbed by girls of birth and fortune, destined by-and-by to play a greater part in the world than a mere plebeian, the daughter of a mother who was

dependent on the settlement of Piedefer's estate. Dinah, having raised herself for the moment above her companions, now aimed at remaining on a level with them for the rest of her life. She determined, therefore, to renounce Calvinism, in the hope that the Cardinal would extend his favor to his proselyte and interest himself in her prospects. You may from this judge of Mademoiselle Dinah's superiority, since at the age of seventeen she was a convert solely from ambition.

The Archbishop, possessed with the idea that Dinah Piedefer would adorn society, was anxious to see her married. But every family to whom the prelate made advances took fright at a damsel gifted with the looks of a princess, who was reputed to be the cleverest of Mademoiselle Chamarolles' pupils and who, at the somewhat theatrical ceremonial of prize-giving, always took a leading part. A thousand crowns a year, which was as much as she could hope for from the estate of La Hautoy when divided between the mother and daughter, would be a mere trifle in comparison with the expenses into which a husband would be led by the personal advantages of so brilliant a creature.

As soon as all these facts came to the ears of little Polydore de la Baudraye – for they were the talk of every circle in the Department of the Cher – he went to Bourges just when Madame Piedefer, a devotee at high services, had almost made up her own mind and her daughter's to take the first comer with well-lined pockets – the first *chien coiffe*, as they say in Le Berry. And if the Cardinal was delighted to receive Monsieur de la Baudraye, Monsieur de la Baudraye was even better pleased to receive a wife from the hands of the Cardinal. The little gentleman only demanded of His Eminence a formal promise to support his claims with the President of the Council to enable him to recover his debts from the Duc de Navarreins "and others" by a lien on their indemnities. This method, however, seemed to the able Minister then occupying the Pavillon Marsan rather too sharp practice, and he gave the vine-owner to understand that his business should be attended to all in good time.

It is easy to imagine the excitement produced in the Sancerre district by the news of Monsieur de la Baudraye's imprudent marriage.

"It is quite intelligible," said President Boirouge; "the little man was very much startled, as I am told, at hearing that handsome young Milaud, the Attorney-General's deputy at Nevers, say to Monsieur de Clagny as they were looking at the turrets of La Baudraye, 'That will be mine some day.' – 'But,' says Clagny, 'he may marry and have children.' – 'Impossible!' – So you may imagine how such a changeling as little La Baudraye must hate that colossal Milaud."

There was at Nevers a plebeian branch of the Milauds, which had grown so rich in the cutlery trade that the present representative of that branch had been brought up to the civil service, in which he had enjoyed the patronage of Marchangy, now dead.

It will be as well to eliminate from this story, in which moral developments play the principal part, the baser material interests which alone occupied Monsieur de la Baudraye, by briefly relating the results of his negotiations in Paris. This will also throw light on certain mysterious phenomena of contemporary history, and the underground difficulties in matters of politics which hampered the Ministry at the time of the Restoration.

The promises of Ministers were so illusory that Monsieur de la Baudraye determined on going to Paris at the time when the Cardinal's presence was required there by the sitting of the Chambers.

This is how the Duc de Navarreins, the principal debtor threatened by Monsieur de la Baudraye, got out of the scrape.

The country gentleman, lodging at the Hotel de Mayence, Rue Saint-Honore, near the Place Vendome, one morning received a visit from a confidential agent of the Ministry, who was an expert in "winding up" business. This elegant personage, who stepped out of an elegant cab, and was dressed in the most elegant style, was requested to walk up to No. 3 – that is to say, to the third floor, to a small room where he found his provincial concocting a cup of coffee over his bedroom fire.

"Is it to Monsieur Milaud de la Baudraye that I have the honor –"

"Yes," said the little man, draping himself in his dressing-gown.

After examining this garment, the illicit offspring of an old chine wrapper of Madame Piedefer's and a gown of the late lamented Madame de la Baudraye, the emissary considered the man, the dressing-gown, and the little stove on which the milk was boiling in a tin saucepan, as so homogeneous and characteristic, that he deemed it needless to beat about the bush.

"I will lay a wager, monsieur," said he, audaciously, "that you dine for forty sous at Hurbain's in the Palais Royal."

"Pray, why?"

"Oh, I know you, having seen you there," replied the Parisian with perfect gravity. "All the princes' creditors dine there. You know that you recover scarcely ten per cent on debts from these fine gentlemen. I would not give you five per cent on a debt to be recovered from the estate of the late Duc d'Orleans – nor even," he added in a low voice – "from MONSIEUR."

"So you have come to buy up the bills?" said La Baudraye, thinking himself very clever.

"Buy them!" said his visitor. "Why, what do you take me for? I am Monsieur des Lupeaulx, Master of Appeals, Secretary-General to the Ministry, and I have come to propose an arrangement."

"What is that?"

"Of course, monsieur, you know the position of your debtor – "

"Of my debtors – "

"Well, monsieur, you understand the position of your debtors; they stand high in the King's good graces, but they have no money, and are obliged to make a good show. – Again, you know the difficulties of the political situation. The aristocracy has to be rehabilitated in the face of a very strong force of the third estate. The King's idea – and France does him scant justice – is to create a peerage as a national institution analogous to the English peerage. To realize this grand idea we need years – and millions. —*Noblesse oblige*. The Duc de Navarreins, who is, as you know, first gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King, does not repudiate his debt; but he cannot – Now, be reasonable. – Consider the state of politics. We are emerging from the pit of the Revolution. – and you yourself are noble – He simply cannot pay – "

"Monsieur – "

"You are hasty," said des Lupeaulx. "Listen. He cannot pay in money. Well, then; you, a clever man, can take payment in favors – Royal or Ministerial."

"What! When in 1793 my father put down one hundred thousand – "

"My dear sir, recrimination is useless. Listen to a simple statement in political arithmetic: The collectorship at Sancerre is vacant; a certain paymaster-general of the forces has a claim on it, but he has no chance of getting it; you have the chance – and no claim. You will get the place. You will hold it for three months, you will then resign, and Monsieur Gravier will give twenty thousand francs for it. In addition, the Order of the Legion of Honor will be conferred on you."

"Well, that is something," said the wine-grower, tempted by the money rather than by the red ribbon.

"But then," said des Lupeaulx, "you must show your gratitude to His Excellency by restoring to Monseigneur the Duc de Navarreins all your claims on him."

La Baudraye returned to Sancerre as Collector of Taxes. Six months later he was superseded by Monsieur Gravier, regarded as one of the most agreeable financiers who had served under the Empire, and who was of course presented by Monsieur de la Baudraye to his wife.

As soon as he was released from his functions, Monsieur de la Baudraye returned to Paris to come to an understanding with some other debtors. This time he was made a Referendary under the Great Seal, Baron, and Officer of the Legion of Honor. He sold the appointment as Referendary; and then the Baron de la Baudraye called on his last remaining debtors, and reappeared at Sancerre as Master of Appeals, with an appointment as Royal Commissioner to a commercial association established in the Nivernais, at a salary of six thousand francs, an absolute sinecure. So the worthy

La Baudraye, who was supposed to have committed a financial blunder, had, in fact, done very good business in the choice of a wife.

Thanks to sordid economy and an indemnity paid him for the estate belonging to his father, nationalized and sold in 1793, by the year 1827 the little man could realize the dream of his whole life. By paying four hundred thousand francs down, and binding himself to further instalments, which compelled him to live for six years on the air as it came, to use his own expression, he was able to purchase the estate of Anzy on the banks of the Loire, about two leagues above Sancerre, and its magnificent castle built by Philibert de l'Orme, the admiration of every connoisseur, and for five centuries the property of the Uxelles family. At last he was one of the great landowners of the province! It is not absolutely certain that the satisfaction of knowing that an entail had been created, by letters patent dated back to December 1820, including the estates of Anzy, of La Baudraye, and of La Hautoy, was any compensation to Dinah on finding herself reduced to unconfessed penuriousness till 1835.

This sketch of the financial policy of the first Baron de la Baudraye explains the man completely. Those who are familiar with the manias of country folks will recognize in him the *land-hunger* which becomes such a consuming passion to the exclusion of every other; a sort of avarice displayed in the sight of the sun, which often leads to ruin by a want of balance between the interest on mortgages and the products of the soil. Those who, from 1802 till 1827, had merely laughed at the little man as they saw him trotting to Saint-Thibault and attending to his business, like a merchant living on his vineyards, found the answer to the riddle when the ant-lion seized his prey, after waiting for the day when the extravagance of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse culminated in the sale of that splendid property.

Madame Piederfer came to live with her daughter. The combined fortunes of Monsieur de la Baudraye and his mother-in-law, who had been content to accept an annuity of twelve hundred francs on the lands of La Hautoy which she handed over to him, amounted to an acknowledged income of about fifteen thousand francs.

During the early days of her married life, Dinah had effected some alterations which had made the house at La Baudraye a very pleasant residence. She turned a spacious forecourt into a formal garden, pulling down wine-stores, presses, and shabby outhouses. Behind the manor-house, which, though small, did not lack style with its turrets and gables, she laid out a second garden with shrubs, flower-beds, and lawns, and divided it from the vineyards by a wall hidden under creepers. She also made everything within doors as comfortable as their narrow circumstances allowed.

In order not to be ruined by a young lady so very superior as Dinah seemed to be, Monsieur de la Baudraye was shrewd enough to say nothing as to the recovery of debts in Paris. This dead secrecy as to his money matters gave a touch of mystery to his character, and lent him dignity in his wife's eyes during the first years of their married life – so majestic is silence!

The alterations effected at La Baudraye made everybody eager to see the young mistress, all the more so because Dinah would never show herself, nor receive any company, before she felt quite settled in her home and had thoroughly studied the inhabitants, and, above all, her taciturn husband. When, one spring morning in 1825, pretty Madame de la Baudraye was first seen walking on the Mall in a blue velvet dress, with her mother in black velvet, there was quite an excitement in Sancerre. This dress confirmed the young woman's reputation for superiority, brought up, as she had been, in the capital of Le Berry. Every one was afraid lest in entertaining this phoenix of the Department, the conversation should not be clever enough; and, of course, everybody was constrained in the presence of Madame de la Baudraye, who produced a sort of terror among the woman-folk. As they admired a carpet of Indian shawl-pattern in the La Baudraye drawing-room, a Pompadour writing-table carved and gilt, brocade window curtains, and a Japanese bowl full of flowers on the round table among a selection of the newest books; when they heard the fair Dinah playing at sight, without making the smallest demur before seating herself at the piano, the idea they conceived of her superiority assumed

vast proportions. That she might never allow herself to become careless or the victim of bad taste, Dinah had determined to keep herself up to the mark as to the fashions and latest developments of luxury by an active correspondence with Anna Grossetete, her bosom friend at Mademoiselle Chamarolles' school.

Anna, thanks to a fine fortune, had married the Comte de Fontaine's third son. Thus those ladies who visited at La Baudraye were perpetually piqued by Dinah's success in leading the fashion; do what they would, they were always behind, or, as they say on the turf, distanced.

While all these trifles gave rise to malignant envy in the ladies of Sancerre, Dinah's conversation and wit engendered absolute aversion. In her ambition to keep her mind on the level of Parisian brilliancy, Madame de la Baudraye allowed no vacuous small talk in her presence, no old-fashioned compliments, no pointless remarks; she would never endure the yelping of tittle-tattle, the backstairs slander which forms the staple of talk in the country. She liked to hear of discoveries in science or art, or the latest pieces at the theatres, the newest poems, and by airing the cant words of the day she made a show of uttering thoughts.

The Abbe Duret, Cure of Sancerre, an old man of a lost type of clergy in France, a man of the world with a liking for cards, had not dared to indulge this taste in so liberal a district as Sancerre; he, therefore, was delighted at Madame de la Baudraye's coming, and they got on together to admiration. The *sous-prefet*, one Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, was delighted to find in Madame de la Baudraye's drawing-room a sort of oasis where there was a truce to provincial life. As to Monsieur de Clagny, the Public Prosecutor, his admiration for the fair Dinah kept him bound to Sancerre. The enthusiastic lawyer refused all promotion, and became a quite pious adorer of this angel of grace and beauty. He was a tall, lean man, with a minatory countenance set off by terrible eyes in deep black circles, under enormous eyebrows; and his eloquence, very unlike his love-making, could be incisive.

Monsieur Gravier was a little, round man, who in the days of the Empire had been a charming ballad-singer; it was this accomplishment that had won him the high position of Paymaster-General of the forces. Having mixed himself up in certain important matters in Spain with generals at that time in opposition, he had made the most of these connections to the Minister, who, in consideration of the place he had lost, promised him the Receivership at Sancerre, and then allowed him to pay for the appointment. The frivolous spirit and light tone of the Empire had become ponderous in Monsieur Gravier; he did not, or would not, understand the wide difference between manners under the Restoration and under the Empire. Still, he conceived of himself as far superior to Monsieur de Clagny; his style was in better taste; he followed the fashion, was to be seen in a buff waistcoat, gray trousers, and neat, tightly-fitting coats; he wore a fashionable silk tie slipped through a diamond ring, while the lawyer never dressed in anything but black – coat, trousers, and waistcoat alike, and those often shabby.

These four men were the first to go into ecstasies over Dinah's cultivation, good taste, and refinement, and pronounced her a woman of most superior mind. Then the women said to each other, "Madame de la Baudraye must laugh at us behind our back."

This view, which was more or less correct, kept them from visiting at La Baudraye. Dinah, attainted and convicted of pedantry, because she spoke grammatically, was nicknamed the Sappho of Saint-Satur. At last everybody made insolent game of the great qualities of the woman who had thus roused the enmity of the ladies of Sancerre. And they ended by denying a superiority – after all, merely comparative! – which emphasized their ignorance, and did not forgive it. Where the whole population is hunch-backed, a straight shape is the monstrosity; Dinah was regarded as monstrous and dangerous, and she found herself in a desert.

Astonished at seeing the women of the neighborhood only at long intervals, and for visits of a few minutes, Dinah asked Monsieur de Clagny the reason of this state of things.

"You are too superior a woman to be liked by other women," said the lawyer.

Monsieur Gravier, when questioned by the forlorn fair, only, after much entreaty, replied:

“Well, lady fair, you are not satisfied to be merely charming. You are clever and well educated, you know every book that comes out, you love poetry, you are a musician, and you talk delightfully. Women cannot forgive so much superiority.”

Men said to Monsieur de la Baudraye:

“You who have such a Superior Woman for a wife are very fortunate –” And at last he himself would say:

“I who have a Superior Woman for a wife, am very fortunate,” etc.

Madame Piedefer, flattered through her daughter, also allowed herself to say such things – “My daughter, who is a very Superior Woman, was writing yesterday to Madame de Fontaine such and such a thing.”

Those who know the world – France, Paris – know how true it is that many celebrities are thus created.

Two years later, by the end of the year 1825, Dinah de la Baudraye was accused of not choosing to have any visitors but men; then it was said that she did not care for women – and that was a crime. Not a thing could she do, not her most trifling action, could escape criticism and misrepresentation. After making every sacrifice that a well-bred woman can make, and placing herself entirely in the right, Madame de la Baudraye was so rash as to say to a false friend who condoled with her on her isolation:

“I would rather have my bowl empty than with anything in it!”

This speech produced a terrible effect on Sancerre, and was cruelly retorted on the Sappho of Saint-Satur when, seeing her childless after five years of married life, *little* de la Baudraye became a byword for laughter. To understand this provincial witticism, readers may be reminded of the Bailli de Ferrette – some, no doubt, having known him – of whom it was said that he was the bravest man in Europe for daring to walk on his legs, and who was accused of putting lead in his shoes to save himself from being blown away. Monsieur de la Baudraye, a sallow and almost diaphanous creature, would have been engaged by the Bailli de Ferrette as first gentleman-in-waiting if that diplomatist had been the Grand Duke of Baden instead of being merely his envoy.

Monsieur de la Baudraye, whose legs were so thin that, for mere decency, he wore false calves, whose thighs were like the arms of an average man, whose body was not unlike that of a cockchafer, would have been an advantageous foil to the Bailli de Ferrette. As he walked, the little vine-owner’s leg-pads often twisted round on to his shins, so little did he make a secret of them, and he would thank any one who warned him of this little mishap. He wore knee-breeches, black silk stockings, and a white waistcoat till 1824. After his marriage he adopted blue trousers and boots with heels, which made Sancerre declare that he had added two inches to his stature that he might come up to his wife’s chin. For ten years he was always seen in the same little bottle-green coat with large white-metal buttons, and a black stock that accentuated his cold stingy face, lighted up by gray-blue eyes as keen and passionless as a cat’s. Being very gentle, as men are who act on a fixed plan of conduct, he seemed to make his wife happy by never contradicting her; he allowed her to do the talking, and was satisfied to move with the deliberate tenacity of an insect.

Dinah, adored for her beauty, in which she had no rival, and admired for her cleverness by the most gentlemanly men of the place, encouraged their admiration by conversations, for which it was subsequently asserted, she prepared herself beforehand. Finding herself listened to with rapture, she soon began to listen to herself, enjoyed haranguing her audience, and at last regarded her friends as the chorus in a tragedy, there only to give her her cues. In fact, she had a very fine collection of phrases and ideas, derived either from books or by assimilating the opinions of her companions, and thus became a sort of mechanical instrument, going off on a round of phrases as soon as some chance remark released the spring. To do her justice, Dinah was choke full of knowledge, and read everything, even medical books, statistics, science, and jurisprudence; for she did not know how to spend her days when she had reviewed her flower-beds and given her orders to the gardener. Gifted with an excellent

memory, and the talent which some women have for hitting on the right word, she could talk on any subject with the lucidity of a studied style. And so men came from Cosne, from la Charite, and from Nevers, on the right bank; from Lere, Vailly, Argent, Blancafort, and Aubigny, on the left bank, to be introduced to Madame de la Baudraye, as they used in Switzerland, to be introduced to Madame de Stael. Those who only once heard the round of tunes emitted by this musical snuff-box went away amazed, and told such wonders of Dinah as made all the women jealous for ten leagues round.

There is an indescribable mental headiness in the admiration we inspire, or in the effect of playing a part, which fends off criticism from reaching the idol. An atmosphere, produced perhaps by unceasing nervous tension, forms a sort of halo, through which the world below is seen. How otherwise can we account for the perennial good faith which leads to so many repeated presentments of the same effects, and the constant ignoring of warnings given by children, such a terror to their parents, or by husbands, so familiar as they are with the peacock airs of their wives? Monsieur de la Baudraye had the frankness of a man who opens an umbrella at the first drop of rain. When his wife was started on the subject of Negro emancipation or the improvement of convict prisons, he would take up his little blue cap and vanish without a sound, in the certainty of being able to get to Saint-Thibault to see off a cargo of puncheons, and return an hour later to find the discussion approaching a close. Or, if he had no business to attend to, he would go for a walk on the Mall, whence he commanded the lovely panorama of the Loire valley, and take a draught of fresh air while his wife was performing a sonata in words, or a dialectical duet.

Once fairly established as a Superior Woman, Dinah was eager to prove her devotion to the most remarkable creations of art. She threw herself into the propaganda of the romantic school, including, under Art, poetry and painting, literature and sculpture, furniture and the opera. Thus she became a mediaevalist. She was also interested in any treasures that dated from the Renaissance, and employed her allies as so many devoted commission agents. Soon after she was married, she had become possessed of the Rougets' furniture, sold at Issoudun early in 1824. She purchased some very good things at Nivernais and the Haute-Loire. At the New Year and on her birthday her friends never failed to give her some curiosities. These fancies found favor in the eyes of Monsieur de la Baudraye; they gave him an appearance of sacrificing a few crowns to his wife's taste. In point of fact, his land mania allowed him to think of nothing but the estate of Anzy.

These "antiquities" at that time cost much less than modern furniture. By the end of five or six years the ante-room, the dining-room, the two drawing-rooms, and the boudoir which Dinah had arranged on the ground floor of La Baudraye, every spot even to the staircase, were crammed with masterpieces collected in the four adjacent departments. These surroundings, which were called *queer* by the neighbors, were quite in harmony with Dinah. All these Marvels, so soon to be the rage, struck the imagination of the strangers introduced to her; they came expecting something unusual; and they found their expectations surpassed when, behind a bower of flowers, they saw these catacombs full of old things, piled up as Sommerard used to pile them – that "Old Mortality" of furniture. And then these finds served as so many springs which, turned on by a question, played off an essay on Jean Goujon, Michel Columb, Germain Pilon, Boulle, Van Huysum, and Boucher, the great native painter of Le Berry; on Clodion, the carver of wood, on Venetian mirrors, on Brustolone, an Italian tenor who was the Michael-Angelo of boxwood and holm oak; on the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, on the glazes of Bernard de Palissy, the enamels of Petitot, the engravings of Albrecht Durer – whom she called Dur; on illuminations on vellum, on Gothic architecture, early decorated, flamboyant and pure – enough to turn an old man's brain and fire a young man with enthusiasm.

Madame de la Baudraye, possessed with the idea of waking up Sancerre, tried to form a so-called literary circle. The Presiding Judge, Monsieur Boirouge, who happened to have a house and garden on his hands, part of the Popinot-Chandier property, favored the notion of this *coterie*. The wily Judge talked over the rules of the society with Madame de la Baudraye; he proposed to figure

as one of the founders, and to let the house for fifteen years to the literary club. By the time it had existed a year the members were playing dominoes, billiards, and bouillotte, and drinking mulled wine, punch, and liqueurs. A few elegant little suppers were then given, and some masked balls during the Carnival. As to literature – there were the newspapers. Politics and business were discussed. Monsieur de la Baudraye was constantly there – on his wife’s account, as she said jestingly.

This result deeply grieved the Superior Woman, who despaired of Sancerre, and collected the wit of the neighborhood in her own drawing-room. Nevertheless, and in spite of the efforts of Messieurs de Chargeboeuf, Gravier, and de Clagny, of the Abbe Duret and the two chief magistrates, of a young doctor, and a young Assistant Judge – all blind admirers of Dinah’s – there were occasions when, weary of discussion, they allowed themselves an excursion into the domain of agreeable frivolity which constitutes the common basis of worldly conversation. Monsieur Gravier called this “from grave to gay.” The Abbe Duret’s rubber made another pleasing variety on the monologues of the oracle. The three rivals, tired of keeping their minds up to the level of the “high range of discussion” – as they called their conversation – but not daring to confess it, would sometimes turn with ingratiating hints to the old priest.

“Monsieur le Cure is dying for his game,” they would say.

The wily priest lent himself very readily to the little trick. He protested.

“We should lose too much by ceasing to listen to our inspired hostess!” and so he would incite Dinah’s magnanimity to take pity at last on her dear Abbe.

This bold manoeuvre, a device of the Sous-prefet’s, was repeated with so much skill that Dinah never suspected her slaves of escaping to the prison yard, so to speak, of the cardtable; and they would leave her one of the younger functionaries to harry.

One young landowner, and the dandy of Sancerre, fell away from Dinah’s good graces in consequence of some rash demonstrations. After soliciting the honor of admission to this little circle, where he flattered himself he could snatch the blossom from the constituted authorities who guarded it, he was so unfortunate as to yawn in the middle of an explanation Dinah was favoring him with – for the fourth time, it is true – of the philosophy of Kant. Monsieur de la Thaumassiere, the grandson of the historian of Le Berry, was thenceforth regarded as a man entirely bereft of soul and brains.

The three devotees *en titre* each submitted to these exorbitant demands on their mind and attention, in hope of a crowning triumph, when at last Dinah should become human; for neither of them was so bold as to imagine that Dinah would give up her innocence as a wife till she should have lost all her illusions. In 1826, when she was surrounded by adorers, Dinah completed her twentieth year, and the Abbe Duret kept her in a sort of fervid Catholicism; so her worshipers had to be content to overwhelm her with little attentions and small services, only too happy to be taken for the carpet-knights of this sovereign lady, by strangers admitted to spend an evening or two at La Baudraye.

“Madame de la Baudraye is a fruit that must be left to ripen.” This was the opinion of Monsieur Gravier, who was waiting.

As to the lawyer, he wrote letters four pages long, to which Dinah replied in soothing speech as she walked, leaning on his arm, round and round the lawn after dinner.

Madame de la Baudraye, thus guarded by three passions, and always under the eye of her pious mother, escaped the malignity of slander. It was so evident to all Sancerre that no two of these three men would ever leave the third alone with Madame de la Baudraye, that their jealousy was a comedy to the lookers-on.

To reach Saint-Thibault from Caesar’s Gate there is a way much shorter than that by the ramparts, down what is known in mountainous districts as a *coursiere*, called at Sancerre *le Cassecou*, or Break-neck Alley. The name is significant as applied to a path down the steepest part of the hillside, thickly strewn with stones, and shut in by the high banks of the vineyards on each side. By way of the Break-neck the distance from Sancerre to La Baudraye is much abridged. The ladies of the place, jealous of the Sappho of Saint-Satur, were wont to walk on the Mall, looking down this

Longchamp of the bigwigs, whom they would stop and engage in conversation – sometimes the Sous-prefet and sometimes the Public Prosecutor – and who would listen with every sign of impatience or uncivil absence of mind. As the turrets of La Baudraye are visible from the Mall, many a younger man came to contemplate the abode of Dinah while envying the ten or twelve privileged persons who might spend their afternoons with the Queen of the neighborhood.

Monsieur de la Baudraye was not slow to discover the advantage he, as Dinah's husband, held over his wife's adorers, and he made use of them without any disguise, obtaining a remission of taxes, and gaining two lawsuits. In every litigation he used the Public Prosecutor's name with such good effect that the matter was carried no further, and, like all undersized men, he was contentious and litigious in business, though in the gentlest manner.

At the same time, the more certainly guiltless she was, the less conceivable did Madame de la Baudraye's position seem to the prying eyes of these women. Frequently, at the house of the Presidente de Boirouge, the ladies of a certain age would spend a whole evening discussing the La Baudraye household, among themselves of course. They all had suspicions of a mystery, a secret such as always interests women who have had some experience of life. And, in fact, at La Baudraye one of those slow and monotonous conjugal tragedies was being played out which would have remained for ever unknown if the merciless scalpel of the nineteenth century, guided by the insistent demand for novelty, had not dissected the darkest corners of the heart, or at any rate those which the decency of past centuries left unopened. And that domestic drama sufficiently accounts for Dinah's immaculate virtue during her early married life.

A young lady, whose triumphs at school had been the outcome of her pride, and whose first scheme in life had been rewarded by a victory, was not likely to pause in such a brilliant career. Frail as Monsieur de la Baudraye might seem, he was really an unhoped-for good match for Mademoiselle Dinah Piedefer. But what was the hidden motive of this country landowner when, at forty-four, he married a girl of seventeen; and what could his wife make out of the bargain? This was the text of Dinah's first meditations.

The little man never behaved quite as his wife expected. To begin with, he allowed her to take the five precious acres now wasted in pleasure grounds round La Baudraye, and paid, almost with generosity, the seven or eight thousand francs required by Dinah for improvements in the house, enabling her to buy the furniture at the Rougets' sale at Issoudun, and to redecorate her rooms in various styles – Mediaeval, Louis XIV., and Pompadour. The young wife found it difficult to believe that Monsieur de la Baudraye was so miserly as he was reputed, or else she must have great influence with him. The illusion lasted a year and a half.

After Monsieur de la Baudraye's second journey to Paris, Dinah discovered in him the Arctic coldness of a provincial miser whenever money was in question. The first time she asked for supplies she played the sweetest of the comedies of which Eve invented the secret; but the little man put it plainly to his wife that he gave her two hundred francs a month for her personal expenses, and paid Madame Piedefer twelve hundred francs a year as a charge on the lands of La Hautoy, and that this was two hundred francs a year more than was agreed to under the marriage settlement.

"I say nothing of the cost of housekeeping," he said in conclusion. "You may give your friends cake and tea in the evening, for you must have some amusement. But I, who spent but fifteen hundred francs a year as a bachelor, now spend six thousand, including rates and repairs, and this is rather too much in relation to the nature of our property. A winegrower is never sure of what his expenses may be – the making, the duty, the casks – while the returns depend on a scorching day or a sudden frost. Small owners, like us, whose income is far from being fixed, must base their estimates on their minimum, for they have no means of making up a deficit or a loss. What would become of us if a wine merchant became bankrupt? In my opinion, promissory notes are so many cabbage-leaves. To live as we are living, we ought always to have a year's income in hand and count on no more than two-thirds of our returns."

Any form of resistance is enough to make a woman vow to subdue it; Dinah flung herself against a will of iron padded round with gentleness. She tried to fill the little man's soul with jealousy and alarms, but it was stockaded with insolent confidence. He left Dinah, when he went to Paris, with all the conviction of Medor in Angelique's fidelity. When she affected cold disdain, to nettle this changeling by the scorn a courtesan sometimes shows to her "protector," and which acts on him with the certainty of the screw of a winepress, Monsieur de la Baudraye gazed at his wife with fixed eyes, like those of a cat which, in the midst of domestic broils, waits till a blow is threatened before stirring from its place. The strange, speechless uneasiness that was perceptible under his mute indifference almost terrified the young wife of twenty; she could not at first understand the selfish quiescence of this man, who might be compared to a cracked pot, and who, in order to live, regulated his existence with the unchangeable regularity which a clockmaker requires of a clock. So the little man always evaded his wife, while she always hit out, as it were, ten feet above his head.

Dinah's fits of fury when she saw herself condemned never to escape from La Baudraye and Sancerre are more easily imagined than described – she who had dreamed of handling a fortune and managing the dwarf whom she, the giant, had at first humored in order to command. In the hope of some day making her appearance on the greater stage of Paris, she accepted the vulgar incense of her attendant knights with a view to seeing Monsieur de la Baudraye's name drawn from the electoral urn; for she supposed him to be ambitious, after seeing him return thrice from Paris, each time a step higher on the social ladder. But when she struck on the man's heart, it was as though she had tapped on marble! The man who had been Receiver-General and Referendary, who was now Master of Appeals, Officer of the Legion of Honor, and Royal Commissioner, was but a mole throwing up its little hills round and round a vineyard! Then some lamentations were poured into the heart of the Public Prosecutor, of the Sous-prefet, even of Monsieur Gravier, and they all increased in their devotion to this sublime victim; for, like all women, she never mentioned her speculative schemes, and – again like all women – finding such speculation vain, she ceased to speculate.

Dinah, tossed by mental storms, was still undecided when, in the autumn of 1827, the news was told of the purchase by the Baron de la Baudraye of the estate of Anzy. Then the little old man showed an impulsion of pride and glee which for a few months changed the current of his wife's ideas; she fancied there was a hidden vein of greatness in the man when she found him applying for a patent of entail. In his triumph the Baron exclaimed:

"Dinah, you shall be a countess yet!"

There was then a patched-up reunion between the husband and wife, such as can never endure, and which only humiliated and fatigued a woman whose apparent superiority was unreal, while her unseen superiority was genuine. This whimsical medley is commoner than people think. Dinah, who was ridiculous from the perversity of her cleverness, had really great qualities of soul, but circumstances did not bring these rarer powers to light, while a provincial life debased the small change of her wit from day to day. Monsieur de la Baudraye, on the contrary, devoid of soul, of strength, and of wit, was fated to figure as a man of character, simply by pursuing a plan of conduct which he was too feeble to change.

There was in their lives a first phase, lasting six years, during which Dinah, alas! became utterly provincial. In Paris there are several kinds of women: the duchess and the financier's wife, the ambadress and the consul's wife, the wife of the minister who is a minister, and of him who is no longer a minister; then there is the lady – quite the lady – of the right bank of the Seine and of the left. But in the country there is but one kind of woman, and she, poor thing, is the provincial woman.

This remark points to one of the sores of modern society. It must be clearly understood: France in the nineteenth century is divided into two broad zones – Paris, and the provinces. The provinces jealous of Paris; Paris never thinking of the provinces but to demand money. Of old, Paris was the Capital of the provinces, and the court ruled the Capital; now, all Paris is the Court, and all the country is the town.

However lofty, beautiful, and clever a girl born in any department of France may be on entering life, if, like Dinah Piedefer, she marries in the country and remains there, she inevitably becomes the provincial woman. In spite of every determination, the commonplace of second-rate ideas, indifference to dress, the culture of vulgar people, swamp the sublimer essence hidden in the youthful plant; all is over, it falls into decay. How should it be otherwise? From their earliest years girls bred in the country see none but provincials; they cannot imagine anything superior, their choice lies among mediocrities; provincial fathers marry their daughters to provincial sons; crossing the races is never thought of, and the brain inevitably degenerates, so that in many country towns intellect is as rare as the breed is hideous. Mankind becomes dwarfed in mind and body, for the fatal principle of conformity of fortune governs every matrimonial alliance. Men of talent, artists, superior brains – every bird of brilliant plumage flies to Paris. The provincial woman, inferior in herself, is also inferior through her husband. How is she to live happy under this crushing twofold consciousness?

But there is a third and terrible element besides her congenital and conjugal inferiority which contributes to make the figure arid and gloomy; to reduce it, narrow it, distort it fatally. Is not one of the most flattering unctions a woman can lay to her soul the assurance of being something in the existence of a superior man, chosen by herself, wittingly, as if to have some revenge on marriage, wherein her tastes were so little consulted? But if in the country the husbands are inferior beings, the bachelors are no less so. When a provincial wife commits her “little sin,” she falls in love with some so-called handsome native, some indigenous dandy, a youth who wears gloves and is supposed to ride well; but she knows at the bottom of her soul that her fancy is in pursuit of the commonplace, more or less well dressed. Dinah was preserved from this danger by the idea impressed upon her of her own superiority. Even if she had not been as carefully guarded in her early married life as she was by her mother, whose presence never weighed upon her till the day when she wanted to be rid of it, her pride, and her high sense of her own destinies, would have protected her. Flattered as she was to find herself surrounded by admirers, she saw no lover among them. No man here realized the poetical ideal which she and Anna Grossetete had been wont to sketch. When, stirred by the involuntary temptations suggested by the homage she received, she asked herself, “If I had to make a choice, who should it be?” she owned to a preference for Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, a gentleman of good family, whose appearance and manners she liked, but whose cold nature, selfishness, and narrow ambition, never rising above a prefecture and a good marriage, repelled her. At a word from his family, who were alarmed lest he should be killed for an intrigue, the Vicomte had already deserted a woman he had loved in the town where he previously had been Sous-prefet.

Monsieur de Clagny, on the other hand, the only man whose mind appealed to hers, whose ambition was founded on love, and who knew what love means, Dinah thought perfectly odious. When Dinah saw herself condemned to six years’ residence at Sancerre she was on the point of accepting the devotion of Monsieur le Vicomte de Chargeboeuf; but he was appointed to a prefecture and left the district. To Monsieur de Clagny’s great satisfaction, the new Sous-prefet was a married man whose wife made friends with Dinah. The lawyer had now no rival to fear but Monsieur Gravier. Now Monsieur Gravier was the typical man of forty of whom women make use while they laugh at him, whose hopes they intentionally and remorselessly encourage, as we are kind to a beast of burden. In six years, among all the men who were introduced to her from twenty leagues round, there was not one in whose presence Dinah was conscious of the excitement caused by personal beauty, by a belief in promised happiness, by the impact of a superior soul, or the anticipation of a love affair, even an unhappy one.

Thus none of Dinah’s choicest faculties had a chance of developing; she swallowed many insults to her pride, which was constantly suffering under the husband who so calmly walked the stage as supernumerary in the drama of her life. Compelled to bury her wealth of love, she showed only the surface to the world. Now and then she would try to rouse herself, try to form some manly resolution; but she was kept in leading strings by the need for money. And so, slowly and in spite of the ambitious

protests and grievous recriminations of her own mind, she underwent the provincial metamorphosis here described. Each day took with it a fragment of her spirited determination. She had laid down a rule for the care of her person, which she gradually departed from. Though at first she kept up with the fashions and the little novelties of elegant life, she was obliged to limit her purchases by the amount of her allowance. Instead of six hats, caps, or gowns, she resigned herself to one gown each season. She was so much admired in a certain bonnet that she made it do duty for two seasons. So it was in everything.

Not unfrequently her artistic sense led her to sacrifice the requirements of her person to secure some bit of Gothic furniture. By the seventh year she had come so low as to think it convenient to have her morning dresses made at home by the best needlewoman in the neighborhood; and her mother, her husband, and her friends pronounced her charming in these inexpensive costumes which did credit to her taste. Her ideas were imitated! As she had no standard of comparison, Dinah fell into the snares that surround the provincial woman. If a Parisian woman's hips are too narrow or too full, her inventive wit and the desire to please help to find some heroic remedy; if she has some defect, some ugly spot, or small disfigurement, she is capable of making it an adornment; this is often seen; but the provincial woman – never! If her waist is too short and her figure ill balanced, well, she makes up her mind to the worst, and her adorers – or they do not adore her – must take her as she is, while the Parisian always insists on being taken for what she is not. Hence the preposterous bustles, the audacious flatness, the ridiculous fulness, the hideous outlines ingeniously displayed, to which a whole town will become accustomed, but which are so astounding when a provincial woman makes her appearance in Paris or among Parisians. Dinah, who was extremely slim, showed it off to excess, and never knew a dull moment when it became ridiculous; when, reduced by the dull weariness of her life, she looked like a skeleton in clothes; and her friends, seeing her every day, did not observe the gradual change in her appearance.

This is one of the natural results of a provincial life. In spite of marriage, a young woman preserves her beauty for some time, and the town is proud of her; but everybody sees her every day, and when people meet every day their perception is dulled. If, like Madame de la Baudraye, she loses her color, it is scarcely noticed; or, again, if she flushes a little, that is intelligible and interesting. A little neglect is thought charming, and her face is so carefully studied, so well known, that slight changes are scarcely noticed, and regarded at last as “beauty spots.” When Dinah ceased to have a new dress with a new season, she seemed to have made a concession to the philosophy of the place.

It is the same with matters of speech, choice of words and ideas, as it is with matters of feeling. The mind can rust as well as the body if it is not rubbed up in Paris; but the thing on which provincialism most sets its stamp is gesture, gait, and movement; these soon lose the briskness which Paris constantly keeps alive. The provincial is used to walk and move in a world devoid of accident or change, there is nothing to be avoided; so in Paris she walks on as raw recruits do, never remembering that there may be hindrances, for there are none in her way in her native place, where she is known, where she is always in her place, and every one makes way for her. Thus she loses all the charm of the unforeseen.

And have you ever noticed the effect on human beings of a life in common? By the ineffaceable instinct of simian mimicry they all tend to copy each other. Each one, without knowing it, acquires the gestures, the tone of voice, the manner, the attitudes, the very countenance of others. In six years Dinah had sunk to the pitch of the society she lived in. As she acquired Monsieur de Clagny's ideas she assumed his tone of voice; she unconsciously fell into masculine manners from seeing none but men; she fancied that by laughing at what was ridiculous in them she was safe from catching it; but, as often happens, some hue of what she laughed at remained in the grain.

A Parisian woman sees so many examples of good taste that a contrary result ensues. In Paris women learn to seize the hour and moment when they may appear to advantage; while Madame de la Baudraye, accustomed to take the stage, acquired an indefinable theatrical and domineering manner,

the air of a *prima donna* coming forward on the boards, of which ironical smiles would soon have cured her in the capital.

But after she had acquired this stock of absurdities, and, deceived by her worshipers, imagined them to be added graces, a moment of terrible awakening came upon her like the fall of an avalanche from a mountain. In one day she was crushed by a frightful comparison.

In 1829, after the departure of Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, she was excited by the anticipation of a little pleasure; she was expecting the Baronne de Fontaine. Anna's husband, who was now Director-General under the Minister of Finance, took advantage of leave of absence on the occasion of his father's death to take his wife to Italy. Anna wished to spend the day at Sancerre with her school-friend. This meeting was strangely disastrous. Anna, who at school had been far less handsome than Dinah, now, as Baronne de Fontaine, was a thousand times handsomer than the Baronne de la Baudraye, in spite of her fatigue and her traveling dress. Anna stepped out of an elegant traveling chaise loaded with Paris milliners' boxes, and she had with her a lady's maid, whose airs quite frightened Dinah. All the difference between a woman of Paris and a provincial was at once evident to Dinah's intelligent eye; she saw herself as her friend saw her – and Anna found her altered beyond recognition. Anna spent six thousand francs a year on herself alone, as much as kept the whole household at La Baudraye.

In twenty-four hours the friends had exchanged many confidences; and the Parisian, seeing herself so far superior to the phoenix of Mademoiselle Chamarolles' school, showed her provincial friend such kindness, such attentions, while giving her certain explanations, as were so many stabs to Dinah, though she perfectly understood that Anna's advantages all lay on the surface, while her own were for ever buried.

When Anna had left, Madame de la Baudraye, by this time two-and-twenty, fell into the depths of despair.

“What is it that ails you?” asked Monsieur de Clagny, seeing her so dejected.

“Anna,” said she, “has learned to live, while I have been learning to endure.”

A tragi-comedy was, in fact, being enacted in Madame de la Baudraye's house, in harmony with her struggles over money matters and her successive transformations – a drama to which no one but Monsieur de Clagny and the Abbe Duret ever knew the clue, when Dinah in sheer idleness, or perhaps sheer vanity, revealed the secret of her anonymous fame.

Though a mixture of verse and prose is a monstrous anomaly in French literature, there must be exceptions to the rule. This tale will be one of the two instances in these Studies of violation of the laws of narrative; for to give a just idea of the unconfessed struggle which may excuse, though it cannot absolve Dinah, it is necessary to give an analysis of a poem which was the outcome of her deep despair.

Her patience and her resignation alike broken by the departure of the Vicomte de Chargeboeuf, Dinah took the worthy Abbe's advice to exhale her evil thoughts in verse – a proceeding which perhaps accounts for some poets.

“You will find such relief as those who write epitaphs or elegies over those whom they have lost. Pain is soothed in the heart as lines surge up in the brain.”

This strange production caused a great ferment in the departments of the Allier, the Nievre, and the Cher, proud to possess a poet capable of rivalry with the glories of Paris. *Paquita la Sevillane*, by *Jan Diaz*, was published in the *Echo du Morvan*, a review which for eighteen months maintained its existence in spite of provincial indifference. Some knowing persons at Nevers declared that Jan Diaz was making fun of the new school, just then bringing out its eccentric verse, full of vitality and imagery, and of brilliant effects produced by defying the Muse under pretext of adapting German, English, and Romanesque mannerisms.

The poem began with this ballad:

Ah! if you knew the fragrant plain,
The air, the sky, of golden Spain,
Its fervid noons, its balmy spring,
Sad daughters of the northern gloom,
Of love, of heav'n, of native home,
You never would presume to sing!

For men are there of other mould
Than those who live in this dull cold.
And there to music low and sweet
Sevillian maids, from eve till dawn,
Dance lightly on the moonlit lawn
In satin shoes, on dainty feet.

Ah, you would be the first to blush
Over your dancers' romp and rush,
And your too hideous carnival,
That turns your cheeks all chill and blue,
And skips the mud in hob-nail'd shoe —
A truly dismal festival.

To pale-faced girls, and in a squalid room,
Paquita sang; the murky town beneath
Was Rouen whence the slender spires rise
To chew the storm with teeth.
Rouen so hideous, noisy, full of rage —

And here followed a magnificent description of Rouen – where Dinah had never been – written with the affected brutality which, a little later, inspired so many imitations of Juvenal; a contrast drawn between the life of a manufacturing town and the careless life of Spain, between the love of Heaven and of human beauty, and the worship of machinery, in short, between poetry and sordid money-making.

Then Jan Diaz accounted for Paquita's horror of Normandy by saying:

Seville, you see, had been her native home,
Seville, where skies are blue and evening sweet.
She, at thirteen, the sovereign of the town,
Had lovers at her feet.

For her three Toreadors had gone to death
Or victory, the prize to be a kiss —
One kiss from those red lips of sweetest breath —
A longed-for touch of bliss!

The features of the Spanish girl's portrait have served so often as those of the courtesan in so many self-styled *poems*, that it would be tiresome to quote here the hundred lines of description. To judge of the lengths to which audacity had carried Dinah, it will be enough to give the conclusion. According to Madame de la Baudraye's ardent pen, Paquita was so entirely created for love that she can hardly have met with a knight worthy of her; for

... In her passionate fire
Every man would have swooned from the heat,
When she at love's feast, in her fervid desire,
As yet had but taken her seat.

“And yet she could quit the joys of Seville, its woods and fields of orange-trees, for a Norman soldier who won her love and carried her away to his hearth and home. She did not weep for her Andalusia, the Soldier was her whole joy... But the day came when he was compelled to start for Russia in the footsteps of the great Emperor.”

Nothing could be more dainty than the description of the parting between the Spanish girl and the Normandy Captain of Artillery, who, in the delirium of passion expressed with feeling worthy of Byron, exacted from Paquita a vow of absolute fidelity, in the Cathedral at Rouen in front of the altar of the Blessed Virgin, who

Though a Maid is a woman, and never forgives
When lovers are false to their vows.

A large part of the poem was devoted to describing Paquita's sufferings when alone in Rouen waiting till the campaign was over; she stood writhing at the window bars as she watched happy couples go by; she suppressed her passion in her heart with a determination that consumed her; she lived on narcotics, and exhausted herself in dreams.

Almost she died, but still her heart was true;
And when at last her soldier came again,
He found her beauty ever fresh and new —
He had not loved in vain!

“But he, pale and frozen by the cold of Russia, chilled to the very marrow, met his yearning fair one with a melancholy smile.”

The whole poem was written up to this situation, which was worked out with such vigor and boldness as too entirely justified the Abbe Duret.

Paquita, on reaching the limits set to real love, did not, like Julie and Heloise, throw herself into the ideal; no, she rushed into the paths of vice, which is, no doubt, shockingly natural; but she did it without any touch of magnificence, for lack of means, as it would be difficult to find in Rouen men impassioned enough to place Paquita in a suitable setting of luxury and splendor. This horrible realism, emphasized by gloomy poetic feeling, had inspired some passages such as modern poetry is too free with, rather too like the flayed anatomical figures known to artists as *ecorches*. Then, by a highly philosophical revulsion, after describing the house of ill-fame where the Andalusian ended her days, the writer came back to the ballad at the opening:

Paquita now is faded, shrunk, and old,
But she it was who sang:

“If you but knew the fragrant plain,
The air, the sky, of golden Spain,” etc.

The gloomy vigor of this poem, running to about six hundred lines, and serving as a powerful foil, to use a painter's word, to the two *seguidillas* at the beginning and end, the masculine utterance

of inexpressible grief, alarmed the woman who found herself admired by three departments, under the black cloak of the anonymous. While she fully enjoyed the intoxicating delights of success, Dinah dreaded the malignity of provincial society, where more than one woman, if the secret should slip out, would certainly find points of resemblance between the writer and Paquita. Reflection came too late; Dinah shuddered with shame at having made “copy” of some of her woes.

“Write no more,” said the Abbe Duret. “You will cease to be a woman; you will be a poet.”

Moulins, Nevers, Bourges were searched to find Jan Diaz; but Dinah was impenetrable. To remove any evil impression, in case any unforeseen chance should betray her name, she wrote a charming poem in two cantos on *The Mass-Oak*, a legend of the Nivernais:

“Once upon a time the folks of Nevers and the folks of Saint-Saulge, at war with each other, came at daybreak to fight a battle, in which one or other should perish, and met in the forest of Faye. And then there stood between them, under an oak, a priest whose aspect in the morning sun was so commanding that the foes at his bidding heard Mass as he performed it under the oak, and at the words of the Gospel they made friends.” – The oak is still shown in the forest of Faye.

This poem, immeasurably superior to *Paquita la Sevillane*, was far less admired.

After these two attempts Madame de la Baudraye, feeling herself a poet, had a light on her brow and a flash in her eyes that made her handsomer than ever. She cast longing looks at Paris, aspiring to fame – and fell back into her den of La Baudraye, her daily squabbles with her husband, and her little circle, where everybody’s character, intentions, and remarks were too well known not to have become a bore. Though she found relief from her dreary life in literary work, and poetry echoed loudly in her empty life, though she thus found an outlet for her energies, literature increased her hatred of the gray and ponderous provincial atmosphere.

When, after the Revolution of 1830, the glory of George Sand was reflected on Le Berry, many a town envied La Chatre the privilege of having given birth to this rival of Madame de Stael and Camille Maupin, and were ready to do homage to minor feminine talent. Thus there arose in France a vast number of tenth Muses, young girls or young wives tempted from a silent life by the bait of glory. Very strange doctrines were proclaimed as to the part women should play in society. Though the sound common sense which lies at the root of the French nature was not perverted, women were suffered to express ideas and profess opinions which they would not have owned to a few years previously.

Monsieur de Clagny took advantage of this outbreak of freedom to collect the works of Jan Diaz in a small volume printed by Desroziers at Moulins. He wrote a little notice of the author, too early snatched from the world of letters, which was amusing to those who were in the secret, but which even then had not the merit of novelty. Such practical jokes, capital so long as the author remains unknown, fall rather flat if subsequently the poet stands confessed.

From this point of view, however, the memoir of Jan Diaz, born at Bourges in 1807, the son of a Spanish prisoner, may very likely some day deceive the compiler of some *Universal Biography*. Nothing is overlooked; neither the names of the professors at the Bourges College, nor those of his deceased schoolfellows, such as Lousteau, Bianchon, and other famous natives of the province, who, it is said, knew the dreamy, melancholy boy, and his precocious bent towards poetry. An elegy called *Tristesse* (Melancholy), written at school; the two poems *Paquita la Sevillane* and *Le Chene de la Messe*; three sonnets, a description of the Cathedral and the House of Jacques Coeur at Bourges, with a tale called *Carola*, published as the work he was engaged on at the time of his death, constituted the whole of these literary remains; and the poet’s last hours, full of misery and despair, could not fail to wring the hearts of the feeling public of the Nievre, the Bourbonnais, the Cher, and the Morvan, where he died near Chateau-Chinon, unknown to all, even to the woman he had loved!

Of this little yellow paper volume two hundred copies were printed; one hundred and fifty were sold – about fifty in each department. This average of tender and poetic souls in three departments of France is enough to revive the enthusiasm of writers as to the *Furia Francese*, which nowadays is more apt to expend itself in business than in books.

When Monsieur de Clagny had given away a certain number of copies, Dinah still had seven or eight, wrapped up in the newspapers which had published notices of the work. Twenty copies forwarded to the Paris papers were swamped in the editors' offices. Nathan was taken in as well as several of his fellow-countrymen of Le Berry, and wrote an article on the great man, in which he credited him with all the fine qualities we discover in those who are dead and buried.

Lousteau, warned by his fellow-schoolfellows, who could not remember Jan Diaz, waited for information from Sancerre, and learned that Jan Diaz was a pseudonym assumed by a woman.

Then, in and around Sancerre, Madame de la Baudraye became the rage; she was the future rival of George Sand. From Sancerre to Bourges a poem was praised which, at any other time, would certainly have been hooted. The provincial public – like every French public, perhaps – does not share the love of the King of the French for the happy medium: it lifts you to the skies or drags you in the mud.

By this time the good Abbe, Madame de la Baudraye's counselor, was dead; he would certainly have prevented her rushing into public life. But three years of work without recognition weighed on Dinah's soul, and she accepted the clatter of fame as a substitute for her disappointed ambitions. Poetry and dreams of celebrity, which had lulled her grief since her meeting with Anna Grossetete, no longer sufficed to exhaust the activity of her morbid heart. The Abbe Duret, who had talked of the world when the voice of religion was impotent, who understood Dinah, and promised her a happy future by assuring her that God would compensate her for her sufferings bravely endured, – this good old man could no longer stand between the opening to sin and the handsome young woman he had called his daughter.

The wise old priest had more than once endeavored to enlighten Dinah as to her husband's character, telling her that the man could hate; but women are not ready to believe in such force in weak natures, and hatred is too constantly in action not to be a vital force. Dinah, finding her husband incapable of love, denied him the power to hate.

“Do not confound hatred and vengeance,” said the Abbe. “They are two different sentiments. One is the instinct of small minds; the other is the outcome of law which great souls obey. God is avenged, but He does not hate. Hatred is a vice of narrow souls; they feed it with all their meanness, and make it a pretext for sordid tyranny. So beware of offending Monsieur de la Baudraye; he would forgive an infidelity, because he could make capital of it, but he would be doubly implacable if you should touch him on the spot so cruelly wounded by Monsieur Milaud of Nevers, and would make your life unendurable.”

Now, at the time when the whole countryside – Nevers and Sancerre, Le Morvan and Le Berry – was priding itself on Madame de la Baudraye, and lauding her under the name of Jan Diaz, “little La Baudraye” felt her glory a mortal blow. He alone knew the secret source of *Paquita la Sevillane*. When this terrible work was spoken of, everybody said of Dinah – “Poor woman! Poor soul!”

The women rejoiced in being able to pity her who had so long oppressed them; never had Dinah seemed to stand higher in the eyes of the neighborhood.

The shriveled old man, more wrinkled, yellower, feebler than ever, gave no sign; but Dinah sometimes detected in his eyes, as he looked at her, a sort of icy venom which gave the lie to his increased politeness and gentleness. She understood at last that this was not, as she had supposed, a mere domestic squabble; but when she forced an explanation with her “insect,” as Monsieur Gravier called him, she found the cold, hard impassibility of steel. She flew into a passion; she reproached him for her life these eleven years past; she made – intentionally – what women call a scene. But “little La Baudraye” sat in an armchair with his eyes shut, and listened phlegmatically to the storm. And, as usual, the dwarf got the better of his wife. Dinah saw that she had done wrong in writing; she vowed never to write another line, and she kept her vow.

Then was there desolation in the Sancerrois.

“Why did not Madame de la Baudraye compose any more verses?” was the universal cry.

At this time Madame de la Baudraye had no enemies; every one rushed to see her, not a week passed without fresh introductions. The wife of the presiding judge, an august *bourgeoise*, nee Popinot-Chandier, desired her son, a youth of two-and-twenty, to pay his humble respects to La Baudraye, and flattered herself that she might see her Gatien in the good graces of this Superior Woman. – The words Superior Woman had superseded the absurd nickname of *The Sappho of Saint-Satur*. – This lady, who for nine years had led the opposition, was so delighted at the good reception accorded to her son, that she became loud in her praises of the Muse of Sancerre.

“After all,” she exclaimed, in reply to a tirade from Madame de Clagny, who hated her husband’s supposed mistress, “she is the handsomest and cleverest woman in the whole province!”

After scrambling through so many brambles and setting off on so many different roads, after dreaming of love in splendor and scenting the darkest dramas, thinking such terrible joys would be cheaply purchased so weary was she of her dreary existence, one day Dinah fell into the pit she had sworn to avoid. Seeing Monsieur de Clagny always sacrificing himself, and at last refusing a high appointment in Paris, where his family wanted to see him, she said to herself, “He loves me!” She vanquished her repulsion, and seemed willing to reward so much constancy.

It was to this impulse of generosity on her part that a coalition was due, formed in Sancerre to secure the return of Monsieur de Clagny at the next elections. Madame de la Baudraye had dreamed of going to Paris in the wake of the new deputy.

But, in spite of the most solemn promises, the hundred and fifty votes to be recorded in favor of this adorer of the lovely Dinah – who hoped to see this defender of the widow and the orphan wearing the gown of the Keeper of the Seals – figured as an imposing minority of fifty votes. The jealousy of the President de Boirouge, and Monsieur Gravier’s hatred, for he believed in the candidate’s supremacy in Dinah’s heart, had been worked upon by a young Sous-prefet; and for this worthy deed the allies got the young man made a prefet elsewhere.

“I shall never cease to regret,” said he, as he quitted Sancerre, “that I did not succeed in pleasing Madame de la Baudraye; that would have made my triumph complete!”

The household that was thus racked by domestic troubles was calm on the surface; here were two ill-assorted but resigned beings, and the indescribable propriety, the lie that society insists on, and which to Dinah was an unendurable yoke. Why did she long to throw off the mask she had worn for twelve years? Whence this weariness which, every day, increased her hope of finding herself a widow?

The reader who has noted all the phases of her existence will have understood the various illusions by which Dinah, like many another woman, had been deceived. After an attempt to master Monsieur de la Baudraye, she had indulged the hope of becoming a mother. Between those miserable disputes over household matters and the melancholy conviction as to her fate, quite a long time had elapsed. Then, when she had looked for consolation, the consoler, Monsieur de Chargeboeuf had left her. Thus, the overwhelming temptation which commonly causes women to sin had hitherto been absent. For if there are, after all, some women who make straight for unfaithfulness, are there not many more who cling to hope, and do not fall till they have wandered long in a labyrinth of secret woes?

Such was Dinah. She had so little impulse to fail in her duty, that she did not care enough for Monsieur de Clagny to forgive him his defeat.

Then the move to the Chateau d’Anzy, the rearrangement of her collected treasures and curiosities, which derived added value from the splendid setting which Philibert de Lorme seemed to have planned on purpose for this museum, occupied her for several months, giving her leisure to meditate one of those decisive steps that startle the public, ignorant of the motives which, however, it sometimes discovers by dint of gossip and suppositions.

Madame de la Baudraye had been greatly struck by the reputation of Lousteau, who was regarded as a lady’s man of the first water in consequence of his intimacies among actresses; she was

anxious to know him; she read his books, and was fired with enthusiasm, less perhaps for his talents than for his successes with women; and to attract him to the country, she started the notion that it was obligatory on Sancerre to return one of its great men at the elections. She made Gatién Boirouge write to the great physician Bianchon, whom he claimed as a cousin through the Popinots. Then she persuaded an old friend of the departed Madame Lousteau to stir up the journalist's ambitions by letting him know that certain persons in Sancerre were firmly bent on electing a deputy from among the distinguished men in Paris.

Tired of her commonplace neighbors, Madame de la Baudraye would thus at last meet really illustrious men, and might give her fall the lustre of fame.

Neither Lousteau nor Bianchon replied; they were waiting perhaps till the holidays. Bianchon, who had won his professor's chair the year before after a brilliant contest, could not leave his lectures.

In the month of September, when the vintage was at its height, the two Parisians arrived in their native province, and found it absorbed in the unremitting toil of the wine-crop of 1836; there could therefore be no public demonstration in their favor. "We have fallen flat," said Lousteau to his companion, in the slang of the stage.

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