HONORÉ DE BALZAC

EUGENIE GRANDET

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DEDICATION

To Maria.

May your name, that of one whose portrait is the noblest ornament of this work, lie on its opening pages like a branch of sacred box, taken from an unknown tree, but sanctified by religion, and kept ever fresh and green by pious hands to bless the house.

De Balzac.

I

There are houses in certain provincial towns whose aspect inspires melancholy, akin to that called forth by sombre cloisters, dreary moorlands, or the desolation of ruins. Within these houses there is, perhaps, the silence of the cloister, the barrenness of moors, the skeleton of ruins; life and movement are so stagnant there that a stranger might think them uninhabited, were it not that he encounters suddenly the pale, cold glance of a motionless person, whose half-monastic face peers beyond the window-casing at the sound of an unaccustomed step.

Such elements of sadness formed the physiognomy, as it were, of a dwelling-house in Saumur which stands at the end of the steep street leading to the chateau in the upper part of the town. This street – now little frequented, hot in summer, cold in winter, dark in certain sections – is remarkable for the resonance of its little pebbly pavement, always clean and dry, for the narrowness of its tortuous road-way, for the peaceful stillness of its houses, which belong to the Old town and are over-topped by the ramparts. Houses three centuries old are still solid, though built of wood, and their divers aspects add to the originality which commends this portion of Saumur to the attention of artists and antiquaries.

It is difficult to pass these houses without admiring the enormous oaken beams, their ends carved into fantastic figures,

which crown with a black bas-relief the lower floor of most of them. In one place these transverse timbers are covered with slate and mark a bluish line along the frail wall of a dwelling covered by a roof *en colombage* which bends beneath the weight of years, and whose rotting shingles are twisted by the alternate action of sun and rain. In another place blackened, worn-out window-sills, with delicate sculptures now scarcely discernible, seem too weak to bear the brown clay pots from which springs the heart's-ease or the rose-bush of some poor working-woman. Farther on are doors studded with enormous nails, where the genius of our forefathers has traced domestic hieroglyphics, of which the meaning is now lost forever. Here a Protestant attested his belief; there a Leaguer cursed Henry IV.; elsewhere some bourgeois has carved the insignia of his *noblesse de cloches*, symbols of his long-forgotten magisterial glory. The whole history of France is there.

Next to a tottering house with roughly plastered walls, where an artisan enshrines his tools, rises the mansion of a country gentleman, on the stone arch of which above the door vestiges of armorial bearings may still be seen, battered by the many revolutions that have shaken France since 1789. In this hilly street the ground-floors of the merchants are neither shops nor warehouses; lovers of the Middle Ages will here find the *ouvrouere* of our forefathers in all its naive simplicity. These low rooms, which have no shop-frontage, no show-windows, in fact no glass at all, are deep and dark and without interior or exterior

decoration. Their doors open in two parts, each roughly iron-bound; the upper half is fastened back within the room, the lower half, fitted with a spring-bell, swings continually to and fro. Air and light reach the damp den within, either through the upper half of the door, or through an open space between the ceiling and a low front wall, breast-high, which is closed by solid shutters that are taken down every morning, put up every evening, and held in place by heavy iron bars.

This wall serves as a counter for the merchandise. No delusive display is there; only samples of the business, whatever it may chance to be, – such, for instance, as three or four tubs full of codfish and salt, a few bundles of sail-cloth, cordage, copper wire hanging from the joists above, iron hoops for casks ranged along the wall, or a few pieces of cloth upon the shelves. Enter. A neat girl, glowing with youth, wearing a white kerchief, her arms red and bare, drops her knitting and calls her father or her mother, one of whom comes forward and sells you what you want, phlegmatically, civilly, or arrogantly, according to his or her individual character, whether it be a matter of two sous' or twenty thousand francs' worth of merchandise. You may see a cooper, for instance, sitting in his doorway and twirling his thumbs as he talks with a neighbor. To all appearance he owns nothing more than a few miserable boat-ribs and two or three bundles of laths; but below in the port his teeming wood-yard supplies all the cooperage trade of Anjou. He knows to a plank how many casks are needed if the vintage is good.

A hot season makes him rich, a rainy season ruins him; in a single morning puncheons worth eleven francs have been known to drop to six. In this country, as in Touraine, atmospheric vicissitudes control commercial life. Wine-growers, proprietors, wood-merchants, coopers, inn-keepers, mariners, all keep watch of the sun. They tremble when they go to bed lest they should hear in the morning of a frost in the night; they dread rain, wind, drought, and want water, heat, and clouds to suit their fancy. A perpetual duel goes on between the heavens and their terrestrial interests. The barometer smooths, saddens, or makes merry their countenances, turn and turn about. From end to end of this street, formerly the Grand'Rue de Saumur, the words: "Here's golden weather," are passed from door to door; or each man calls to his neighbor: "It rains louis," knowing well what a sunbeam or the opportune rainfall is bringing him.

On Saturdays after midday, in the fine season, not one sou's worth of merchandise can be bought from these worthy traders. Each has his vineyard, his enclosure of fields, and all spend two days in the country. This being foreseen, and purchases, sales, and profits provided for, the merchants have ten or twelve hours to spend in parties of pleasure, in making observations, in criticisms, and in continual spying. A housewife cannot buy a partridge without the neighbors asking the husband if it were cooked to a turn. A young girl never puts her head near a window that she is not seen by idling groups in the street. Consciences are held in the light; and the houses, dark, silent, impenetrable as

they seem, hide no mysteries. Life is almost wholly in the open air; every household sits at its own threshold, breakfasts, dines, and quarrels there. No one can pass along the street without being examined; in fact formerly, when a stranger entered a provincial town he was bantered and made game of from door to door. From this came many good stories, and the nickname *copieux*, which was applied to the inhabitants of Angers, who excelled in such urban sarcasms.

The ancient mansions of the old town of Saumur are at the top of this hilly street, and were formerly occupied by the nobility of the neighborhood. The melancholy dwelling where the events of the following history took place is one of these mansions, – venerable relics of a century in which men and things bore the characteristics of simplicity which French manners and customs are losing day by day. Follow the windings of the picturesque thoroughfare, whose irregularities awaken recollections that plunge the mind mechanically into reverie, and you will see a somewhat dark recess, in the centre of which is hidden the door of the house of Monsieur Grandet. It is impossible to understand the force of this provincial expression – the house of Monsieur Grandet – without giving the biography of Monsieur Grandet himself.

Monsieur Grandet enjoyed a reputation in Saumur whose causes and effects can never be fully understood by those who have not, at one time or another, lived in the provinces. In 1789 Monsieur Grandet – still called by certain persons le Pere

Grandet, though the number of such old persons has perceptibly diminished – was a master-cooper, able to read, write, and cipher. At the period when the French Republic offered for sale the church property in the arrondissement of Saumur, the cooper, then forty years of age, had just married the daughter of a rich wood-merchant. Supplied with the ready money of his own fortune and his wife's *dot*, in all about two thousand louis-d'or, Grandet went to the newly established "district," where, with the help of two hundred double louis given by his father-in-law to the surly republican who presided over the sales of the national domain, he obtained for a song, legally if not legitimately, one of the finest vineyards in the arrondissement, an old abbey, and several farms. The inhabitants of Saumur were so little revolutionary that they thought Pere Grandet a bold man, a republican, and a patriot with a mind open to all the new ideas; though in point of fact it was open only to vineyards. He was appointed a member of the administration of Saumur, and his pacific influence made itself felt politically and commercially. Politically, he protected the ci-devant nobles, and prevented, to the extent of his power, the sale of the lands and property of the *emigres*; commercially, he furnished the Republican armies with two or three thousand puncheons of white wine, and took his pay in splendid fields belonging to a community of women whose lands had been reserved for the last lot.

Under the Consulate Grandet became mayor, governed wisely, and harvested still better pickings. Under the Empire

he was called Monsieur Grandet. Napoleon, however, did not like republicans, and superseded Monsieur Grandet (who was supposed to have worn the Phrygian cap) by a man of his own surroundings, a future baron of the Empire. Monsieur Grandet quitted office without regret. He had constructed in the interests of the town certain fine roads which led to his own property; his house and lands, very advantageously assessed, paid moderate taxes; and since the registration of his various estates, the vineyards, thanks to his constant care, had become the "head of the country," – a local term used to denote those that produced the finest quality of wine. He might have asked for the cross of the Legion of honor.

This event occurred in 1806. Monsieur Grandet was then fifty-seven years of age, his wife thirty-six, and an only daughter, the fruit of their legitimate love, was ten years old. Monsieur Grandet, whom Providence no doubt desired to compensate for the loss of his municipal honors, inherited three fortunes in the course of this year, – that of Madame de la Gaudiniere, born de la Bertelliere, the mother of Madame Grandet; that of old Monsieur de la Bertelliere, her grandfather; and, lastly, that of Madame Gentillet, her grandmother on the mother's side: three inheritances, whose amount was not known to any one. The avarice of the deceased persons was so keen that for a long time they had hoarded their money for the pleasure of secretly looking at it. Old Monsieur de la Bertelliere called an investment an extravagance, and thought he got better interest from the sight

of his gold than from the profits of usury. The inhabitants of Saumur consequently estimated his savings according to "the revenues of the sun's wealth," as they said.

Monsieur Grandet thus obtained that modern title of nobility which our mania for equality can never rub out. He became the most imposing personage in the arrondissement. He worked a hundred acres of vineyard, which in fruitful years yielded seven or eight hundred hogsheads of wine. He owned thirteen farms, an old abbey, whose windows and arches he had walled up for the sake of economy, – a measure which preserved them, – also a hundred and twenty-seven acres of meadow-land, where three thousand poplars, planted in 1793, grew and flourished; and finally, the house in which he lived. Such was his visible estate; as to his other property, only two persons could give even a vague guess at its value: one was Monsieur Cruchot, a notary employed in the usurious investments of Monsieur Grandet; the other was Monsieur des Grassins, the richest banker in Saumur, in whose profits Grandet had a certain covenanted and secret share.

Although old Cruchot and Monsieur des Grassins were both gifted with the deep discretion which wealth and trust beget in the provinces, they publicly testified so much respect to Monsieur Grandet that observers estimated the amount of his property by the obsequious attention which they bestowed upon him. In all Saumur there was no one not persuaded that Monsieur Grandet had a private treasure, some hiding-place full of louis, where he nightly took ineffable delight in gazing

upon great masses of gold. Avaricious people gathered proof of this when they looked at the eyes of the good man, to which the yellow metal seemed to have conveyed its tints. The glance of a man accustomed to draw enormous interest from his capital acquires, like that of the libertine, the gambler, or the sycophant, certain indefinable habits, – furtive, eager, mysterious movements, which never escape the notice of his co-religionists. This secret language is in a certain way the freemasonry of the passions. Monsieur Grandet inspired the respectful esteem due to one who owed no man anything, who, skilful cooper and experienced wine-grower that he was, guessed with the precision of an astronomer whether he ought to manufacture a thousand puncheons for his vintage, or only five hundred, who never failed in any speculation, and always had casks for sale when casks were worth more than the commodity that filled them, who could store his whole vintage in his cellars and bide his time to put the puncheons on the market at two hundred francs, when the little proprietors had been forced to sell theirs for five louis. His famous vintage of 1811, judiciously stored and slowly disposed of, brought him in more than two hundred and forty thousand francs.

Financially speaking, Monsieur Grandet was something between a tiger and a boa-constrictor. He could crouch and lie low, watch his prey a long while, spring upon it, open his jaws, swallow a mass of louis, and then rest tranquilly like a snake in process of digestion, impassible, methodical, and cold.

No one saw him pass without a feeling of admiration mingled with respect and fear; had not every man in Saumur felt the rending of those polished steel claws? For this one, Maitre Cruchot had procured the money required for the purchase of a domain, but at eleven per cent. For that one, Monsieur des Grassins discounted bills of exchange, but at a frightful deduction of interest. Few days ever passed that Monsieur Grandet's name was not mentioned either in the markets or in social conversations at the evening gatherings. To some the fortune of the old wine-grower was an object of patriotic pride. More than one merchant, more than one innkeeper, said to strangers with a certain complacency: "Monsieur, we have two or three millionaire establishments; but as for Monsieur Grandet, he does not himself know how much he is worth."

In 1816 the best reckoners in Saumur estimated the landed property of the worthy man at nearly four millions; but as, on an average, he had made yearly, from 1793 to 1817, a hundred thousand francs out of that property, it was fair to presume that he possessed in actual money a sum nearly equal to the value of his estate. So that when, after a game of boston or an evening discussion on the matter of vines, the talk fell upon Monsieur Grandet, knowing people said: "Le Pere Grandet? le Pere Grandet must have at least five or six millions."

"You are cleverer than I am; I have never been able to find out the amount," answered Monsieur Cruchot or Monsieur des Grassins, when either chanced to overhear the remark.

If some Parisian mentioned Rothschild or Monsieur Lafitte, the people of Saumur asked if he were as rich as Monsieur Grandet. When the Parisian, with a smile, tossed them a disdainful affirmative, they looked at each other and shook their heads with an incredulous air. So large a fortune covered with a golden mantle all the actions of this man. If in early days some peculiarities of his life gave occasion for laughter or ridicule, laughter and ridicule had long since died away. His least important actions had the authority of results repeatedly shown. His speech, his clothing, his gestures, the blinking of his eyes, were law to the country-side, where every one, after studying him as a naturalist studies the result of instinct in the lower animals, had come to understand the deep mute wisdom of his slightest actions.

"It will be a hard winter," said one; "Pere Grandet has put on his fur gloves."

"Pere Grandet is buying quantities of staves; there will be plenty of wine this year."

Monsieur Grandet never bought either bread or meat. His farmers supplied him weekly with a sufficiency of capons, chickens, eggs, butter, and his tithe of wheat. He owned a mill; and the tenant was bound, over and above his rent, to take a certain quantity of grain and return him the flour and bran. La Grande Nanon, his only servant, though she was no longer young, baked the bread of the household herself every Saturday. Monsieur Grandet arranged with kitchen-gardeners who were his

tenants to supply him with vegetables. As to fruits, he gathered such quantities that he sold the greater part in the market. His fire-wood was cut from his own hedgerows or taken from the half-rotten old sheds which he built at the corners of his fields, and whose planks the farmers carted into town for him, all cut up, and obligingly stacked in his wood-house, receiving in return his thanks. His only known expenditures were for the consecrated bread, the clothing of his wife and daughter, the hire of their chairs in church, the wages of la Grand Nanon, the tinning of the saucepans, lights, taxes, repairs on his buildings, and the costs of his various industries. He had six hundred acres of woodland, lately purchased, which he induced a neighbor's keeper to watch, under the promise of an indemnity. After the acquisition of this property he ate game for the first time.

Monsieur Grandet's manners were very simple. He spoke little. He usually expressed his meaning by short sententious phrases uttered in a soft voice. After the Revolution, the epoch at which he first came into notice, the good man stuttered in a wearisome way as soon as he was required to speak at length or to maintain an argument. This stammering, the incoherence of his language, the flux of words in which he drowned his thought, his apparent lack of logic, attributed to defects of education, were in reality assumed, and will be sufficiently explained by certain events in the following history. Four sentences, precise as algebraic formulas, sufficed him usually to grasp and solve all difficulties of life and commerce: "I don't know; I cannot;

I will not; I will see about it." He never said yes, or no, and never committed himself to writing. If people talked to him he listened coldly, holding his chin in his right hand and resting his right elbow in the back of his left hand, forming in his own mind opinions on all matters, from which he never receded. He reflected long before making any business agreement. When his opponent, after careful conversation, avowed the secret of his own purposes, confident that he had secured his listener's assent, Grandet answered: "I can decide nothing without consulting my wife." His wife, whom he had reduced to a state of helpless slavery, was a useful screen to him in business. He went nowhere among friends; he neither gave nor accepted dinners; he made no stir or noise, seeming to economize in everything, even movement. He never disturbed or disarranged the things of other people, out of respect for the rights of property. Nevertheless, in spite of his soft voice, in spite of his circumspect bearing, the language and habits of a coarse nature came to the surface, especially in his own home, where he controlled himself less than elsewhere.

Physically, Grandet was a man five feet high, thick-set, square-built, with calves twelve inches in circumference, knotted knee-joints, and broad shoulders; his face was round, tanned, and pitted by the small-pox; his chin was straight, his lips had no curves, his teeth were white; his eyes had that calm, devouring expression which people attribute to the basilisk; his forehead, full of transverse wrinkles, was not without certain significant

protuberances; his yellow-grayish hair was said to be silver and gold by certain young people who did not realize the impropriety of making a jest about Monsieur Grandet. His nose, thick at the end, bore a veined wen, which the common people said, not without reason, was full of malice. The whole countenance showed a dangerous cunning, an integrity without warmth, the egotism of a man long used to concentrate every feeling upon the enjoyments of avarice and upon the only human being who was anything whatever to him, – his daughter and sole heiress, Eugenie. Attitude, manners, bearing, everything about him, in short, testified to that belief in himself which the habit of succeeding in all enterprises never fails to give to a man.

Thus, though his manners were unctuous and soft outwardly, Monsieur Grandet's nature was of iron. His dress never varied; and those who saw him to-day saw him such as he had been since 1791. His stout shoes were tied with leathern thongs; he wore, in all weathers, thick woollen stockings, short breeches of coarse maroon cloth with silver buckles, a velvet waistcoat, in alternate stripes of yellow and puce, buttoned squarely, a large maroon coat with wide flaps, a black cravat, and a quaker's hat. His gloves, thick as those of a gendarme, lasted him twenty months; to preserve them, he always laid them methodically on the brim of his hat in one particular spot. Saumur knew nothing further about this personage.

Only six individuals had a right of entrance to Monsieur Grandet's house. The most important of the first three was a

nephew of Monsieur Cruchot. Since his appointment as president of the Civil courts of Saumur this young man had added the name of Bonfons to that of Cruchot. He now signed himself C. de Bonfons. Any litigant so ill-advised as to call him Monsieur Cruchot would soon be made to feel his folly in court. The magistrate protected those who called him Monsieur le president, but he favored with gracious smiles those who addressed him as Monsieur de Bonfons. Monsieur le president was thirty-three years old, and possessed the estate of Bonfons (Boni Fontis), worth seven thousand francs a year; he expected to inherit the property of his uncle the notary and that of another uncle, the Abbe Cruchot, a dignitary of the chapter of Saint-Martin de Tours, both of whom were thought to be very rich. These three Cruchots, backed by a goodly number of cousins, and allied to twenty families in the town, formed a party, like the Medici in Florence; like the Medici, the Cruchots had their Pazzi.

Madame des Grassins, mother of a son twenty-three years of age, came assiduously to play cards with Madame Grandet, hoping to marry her dear Adolphe to Mademoiselle Eugenie. Monsieur des Grassins, the banker, vigorously promoted the schemes of his wife by means of secret services constantly rendered to the old miser, and always arrived in time upon the field of battle. The three des Grassins likewise had their adherents, their cousins, their faithful allies. On the Cruchot side the abbe, the Talleyrand of the family, well backed-up by his brother the notary, sharply contested every inch of ground with

his female adversary, and tried to obtain the rich heiress for his nephew the president.

This secret warfare between the Cruchots and des Grassins, the prize thereof being the hand in marriage of Eugenie Grandet, kept the various social circles of Saumur in violent agitation. Would Mademoiselle Grandet marry Monsieur le president or Monsieur Adolphe des Grassins? To this problem some replied that Monsieur Grandet would never give his daughter to the one or to the other. The old cooper, eaten up with ambition, was looking, they said, for a peer of France, to whom an income of three hundred thousand francs would make all the past, present, and future casks of the Grandets acceptable. Others replied that Monsieur and Madame des Grassins were nobles, and exceedingly rich; that Adolphe was a personable young fellow; and that unless the old man had a nephew of the pope at his beck and call, such a suitable alliance ought to satisfy a man who came from nothing, – a man whom Saumur remembered with an adze in his hand, and who had, moreover, worn the *bonnet rouge*. Certain wise heads called attention to the fact that Monsieur Cruchot de Bonfons had the right of entry to the house at all times, whereas his rival was received only on Sundays. Others, however, maintained that Madame des Grassins was more intimate with the women of the house of Grandet than the Cruchots were, and could put into their minds certain ideas which would lead, sooner or later, to success. To this the former retorted that the Abbe Cruchot was the most insinuating man

in the world: pit a woman against a monk, and the struggle was even. “It is diamond cut diamond,” said a Saumur wit.

The oldest inhabitants, wiser than their fellows, declared that the Grandets knew better than to let the property go out of the family, and that Mademoiselle Eugenie Grandet of Saumur would be married to the son of Monsieur Grandet of Paris, a wealthy wholesale wine-merchant. To this the Cruchotines and the Grassinists replied: “In the first place, the two brothers have seen each other only twice in thirty years; and next, Monsieur Grandet of Paris has ambitious designs for his son. He is mayor of an arrondissement, a deputy, colonel of the National Guard, judge in the commercial courts; he disowns the Grandets of Saumur, and means to ally himself with some ducal family, – ducal under favor of Napoleon.” In short, was there anything not said of an heiress who was talked of through a circumference of fifty miles, and even in the public conveyances from Angers to Blois, inclusively!

At the beginning of 1811, the Cruchotines won a signal advantage over the Grassinists. The estate of Froidfond, remarkable for its park, its mansion, its farms, streams, ponds, forests, and worth about three millions, was put up for sale by the young Marquis de Froidfond, who was obliged to liquidate his possessions. Maitre Cruchot, the president, and the abbe, aided by their adherents, were able to prevent the sale of the estate in little lots. The notary concluded a bargain with the young man for the whole property, payable in gold, persuading him that suits

without number would have to be brought against the purchasers of small lots before he could get the money for them; it was better, therefore, to sell the whole to Monsieur Grandet, who was solvent and able to pay for the estate in ready money. The fine marquisate of Froidfond was accordingly conveyed down the gullet of Monsieur Grandet, who, to the great astonishment of Saumur, paid for it, under proper discount, with the usual formalities.

This affair echoed from Nantes to Orleans. Monsieur Grandet took advantage of a cart returning by way of Froidfond to go and see his chateau. Having cast a master's eye over the whole property, he returned to Saumur, satisfied that he had invested his money at five per cent, and seized by the stupendous thought of extending and increasing the marquisate of Froidfond by concentrating all his property there. Then, to fill up his coffers, now nearly empty, he resolved to thin out his woods and his forests, and to sell off the poplars in the meadows.

II

It is now easy to understand the full meaning of the term, "the house of Monsieur Grandet," – that cold, silent, pallid dwelling, standing above the town and sheltered by the ruins of the ramparts. The two pillars and the arch, which made the porte-cochere on which the door opened, were built, like the house itself, of tufa, – a white stone peculiar to the shores of the Loire, and so soft that it lasts hardly more than two centuries. Numberless irregular holes, capriciously bored or eaten out by the inclemency of the weather, gave an appearance of the vermiculated stonework of French architecture to the arch and the side walls of this entrance, which bore some resemblance to the gateway of a jail. Above the arch was a long bas-relief, in hard stone, representing the four seasons, the faces already crumbling away and blackened. This bas-relief was surmounted by a projecting plinth, upon which a variety of chance growths had sprung up, – yellow pellitory, bindweed, convolvuli, nettles, plantain, and even a little cherry-tree, already grown to some height.

The door of the archway was made of solid oak, brown, shrunken, and split in many places; though frail in appearance, it was firmly held in place by a system of iron bolts arranged in symmetrical patterns. A small square grating, with close bars red with rust, filled up the middle panel and made, as it were, a

motive for the knocker, fastened to it by a ring, which struck upon the grinning head of a huge nail. This knocker, of the oblong shape and kind which our ancestors called *jaquemart*, looked like a huge note of exclamation; an antiquary who examined it attentively might have found indications of the figure, essentially burlesque, which it once represented, and which long usage had now effaced. Through this little grating – intended in olden times for the recognition of friends in times of civil war – inquisitive persons could perceive, at the farther end of the dark and slimy vault, a few broken steps which led to a garden, picturesquely shut in by walls that were thick and damp, and through which oozed a moisture that nourished tufts of sickly herbage. These walls were the ruins of the ramparts, under which ranged the gardens of several neighboring houses.

The most important room on the ground-floor of the house was a large hall, entered directly from beneath the vault of the porte-cochere. Few people know the importance of a hall in the little towns of Anjou, Touraine, and Berry. The hall is at one and the same time antechamber, salon, office, boudoir, and dining-room; it is the theatre of domestic life, the common living-room. There the barber of the neighborhood came, twice a year, to cut Monsieur Grandet's hair; there the farmers, the cure, the under-prefect, and the miller's boy came on business. This room, with two windows looking on the street, was entirely of wood. Gray panels with ancient mouldings covered the walls from top to bottom; the ceiling showed all its beams, which

were likewise painted gray, while the space between them had been washed over in white, now yellow with age. An old brass clock, inlaid with arabesques, adorned the mantel of the ill-cut white stone chimney-piece, above which was a greenish mirror, whose edges, bevelled to show the thickness of the glass, reflected a thread of light the whole length of a gothic frame in damascened steel-work. The two copper-gilt candelabra which decorated the corners of the chimney-piece served a double purpose: by taking off the side-branches, each of which held a socket, the main stem – which was fastened to a pedestal of bluish marble tipped with copper – made a candlestick for one candle, which was sufficient for ordinary occasions. The chairs, antique in shape, were covered with tapestry representing the fables of La Fontaine; it was necessary, however, to know that writer well to guess at the subjects, for the faded colors and the figures, blurred by much darning, were difficult to distinguish.

At the four corners of the hall were closets, or rather buffets, surmounted by dirty shelves. An old card-table in marquetry, of which the upper part was a chess-board, stood in the space between the two windows. Above this table was an oval barometer with a black border enlivened with gilt bands, on which the flies had so licentiously disported themselves that the gilding had become problematical. On the panel opposite to the chimney-piece were two portraits in pastel, supposed to represent the grandfather of Madame Grandet, old Monsieur de la Bertelliere, as a lieutenant in the French guard, and the

deceased Madame Gentillet in the guise of a shepherdess. The windows were draped with curtains of red *gros de Tours* held back by silken cords with ecclesiastical tassels. This luxurious decoration, little in keeping with the habits of Monsieur Grandet, had been, together with the steel pier-glass, the tapestries, and the buffets, which were of rose-wood, included in the purchase of the house.

By the window nearest to the door stood a straw chair, whose legs were raised on castors to lift its occupant, Madame Grandet, to a height from which she could see the passers-by. A work-table of stained cherry-wood filled up the embrasure, and the little armchair of Eugenie Grandet stood beside it. In this spot the lives had flowed peacefully onward for fifteen years, in a round of constant work from the month of April to the month of November. On the first day of the latter month they took their winter station by the chimney. Not until that day did Grandet permit a fire to be lighted; and on the thirty-first of March it was extinguished, without regard either to the chills of the early spring or to those of a wintry autumn. A foot-warmer, filled with embers from the kitchen fire, which la Grande Nanon contrived to save for them, enabled Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet to bear the chilly mornings and evenings of April and October. Mother and daughter took charge of the family linen, and spent their days so conscientiously upon a labor properly that of working-women, that if Eugenie wished to embroider a collar for her mother she was forced to take the time from sleep, and

deceive her father to obtain the necessary light. For a long time the miser had given out the tallow candle to his daughter and la Grande Nanon just as he gave out every morning the bread and other necessaries for the daily consumption.

La Grande Nanon was perhaps the only human being capable of accepting willingly the despotism of her master. The whole town envied Monsieur and Madame Grandet the possession of her. La Grande Nanon, so called on account of her height, which was five feet eight inches, had lived with Monsieur Grandet for thirty-five years. Though she received only sixty francs a year in wages, she was supposed to be one of the richest serving-women in Saumur. Those sixty francs, accumulating through thirty-five years, had recently enabled her to invest four thousand francs in an annuity with Maitre Cruchot. This result of her long and persistent economy seemed gigantic. Every servant in the town, seeing that the poor sexagenarian was sure of bread for her old age, was jealous of her, and never thought of the hard slavery through which it had been won.

At twenty-two years of age the poor girl had been unable to find a situation, so repulsive was her face to almost every one. Yet the feeling was certainly unjust: the face would have been much admired on the shoulders of a grenadier of the guard; but all things, so they say, should be in keeping. Forced to leave a farm where she kept the cows, because the dwelling-house was burned down, she came to Saumur to find a place, full of the robust courage that shrinks from no labor. Le Pere Grandet was at that

time thinking of marriage and about to set up his household. He espied the girl, rejected as she was from door to door. A good judge of corporeal strength in his trade as a cooper, he guessed the work that might be got out of a female creature shaped like a Hercules, as firm on her feet as an oak sixty years old on its roots, strong in the hips, square in the back, with the hands of a cartman and an honesty as sound as her unblemished virtue. Neither the warts which adorned her martial visage, nor the red-brick tints of her skin, nor the sinewy arms, nor the ragged garments of la Grande Nanon, dismayed the cooper, who was at that time still of an age when the heart shudders. He fed, shod, and clothed the poor girl, gave her wages, and put her to work without treating her too roughly. Seeing herself thus welcomed, la Grande Nanon wept secretly tears of joy, and attached herself in all sincerity to her master, who from that day ruled her and worked her with feudal authority. Nanon did everything. She cooked, she made the lye, she washed the linen in the Loire and brought it home on her shoulders; she got up early, she went to bed late; she prepared the food of the vine-dressers during the harvest, kept watch upon the market-people, protected the property of her master like a faithful dog, and even, full of blind confidence, obeyed without a murmur his most absurd exactions.

In the famous year of 1811, when the grapes were gathered with unheard-of difficulty, Grandet resolved to give Nanon his old watch, – the first present he had made her during twenty years of service. Though he turned over to her his old shoes (which

fitted her), it is impossible to consider that quarterly benefit as a gift, for the shoes were always thoroughly worn-out. Necessity had made the poor girl so niggardly that Grandet had grown to love her as we love a dog, and Nanon had let him fasten a spiked collar round her throat, whose spikes no longer pricked her. If Grandet cut the bread with rather too much parsimony, she made no complaint; she gaily shared the hygienic benefits derived from the severe regime of the household, in which no one was ever ill. Nanon was, in fact, one of the family; she laughed when Grandet laughed, felt gloomy or chilly, warmed herself, and toiled as he did. What pleasant compensations there were in such equality! Never did the master have occasion to find fault with the servant for pilfering the grapes, nor for the plums and nectarines eaten under the trees. "Come, fall-to, Nanon!" he would say in years when the branches bent under the fruit and the farmers were obliged to give it to the pigs.

To the poor peasant who in her youth had earned nothing but harsh treatment, to the pauper girl picked up by charity, Grandet's ambiguous laugh was like a sunbeam. Moreover, Nanon's simple heart and narrow head could hold only one feeling and one idea. For thirty-five years she had never ceased to see herself standing before the wood-yard of Monsieur Grandet, ragged and barefooted, and to hear him say: "What do you want, young one?" Her gratitude was ever new. Sometimes Grandet, reflecting that the poor creature had never heard a flattering word, that she was ignorant of all the tender sentiments inspired

by women, that she might some day appear before the throne of God even more chaste than the Virgin Mary herself, – Grandet, struck with pity, would say as he looked at her, "Poor Nanon!" The exclamation was always followed by an undefinable look cast upon him in return by the old servant. The words, uttered from time to time, formed a chain of friendship that nothing ever parted, and to which each exclamation added a link. Such compassion arising in the heart of the miser, and accepted gratefully by the old spinster, had something inconceivably horrible about it. This cruel pity, recalling, as it did, a thousand pleasures to the heart of the old cooper, was for Nanon the sum total of happiness. Who does not likewise say, "Poor Nanon!" God will recognize his angels by the inflexions of their voices and by their secret sighs.

There were very many households in Saumur where the servants were better treated, but where the masters received far less satisfaction in return. Thus it was often said: "What have the Grandets ever done to make their Grande Nanon so attached to them? She would go through fire and water for their sake!" Her kitchen, whose barred windows looked into the court, was always clean, neat, cold, – a true miser's kitchen, where nothing went to waste. When Nanon had washed her dishes, locked up the remains of the dinner, and put out her fire, she left the kitchen, which was separated by a passage from the living-room, and went to spin hemp beside her masters. One tallow candle sufficed the family for the evening. The servant slept at the end of the passage

in a species of closet lighted only by a fan-light. Her robust health enabled her to live in this hole with impunity; there she could hear the slightest noise through the deep silence which reigned night and day in that dreary house. Like a watch-dog, she slept with one ear open, and took her rest with a mind alert.

A description of the other parts of the dwelling will be found connected with the events of this history, though the foregoing sketch of the hall, where the whole luxury of the household appears, may enable the reader to surmise the nakedness of the upper floors.

In 1819, at the beginning of an evening in the middle of November, la Grande Nanon lighted the fire for the first time. The autumn had been very fine. This particular day was a fete-day well known to the Cruchotines and the Grassinists. The six antagonists, armed at all points, were making ready to meet at the Grandets and surpass each other in testimonials of friendship. That morning all Saumur had seen Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet, accompanied by Nanon, on their way to hear Mass at the parish church, and every one remembered that the day was the anniversary of Mademoiselle Eugenie's birth. Calculating the hour at which the family dinner would be over, Maitre Cruchot, the Abbe Cruchot, and Monsieur C. de Bonfons hastened to arrive before the des Grassins, and be the first to pay their compliments to Mademoiselle Eugenie. All three brought enormous bouquets, gathered in their little green-houses. The stalks of the flowers which the president intended to

present were ingeniously wound round with a white satin ribbon adorned with gold fringe. In the morning Monsieur Grandet, following his usual custom on the days that commemorated the birth and the fete of Eugenie, went to her bedside and solemnly presented her with his paternal gift, – which for the last thirteen years had consisted regularly of a curious gold-piece. Madame Grandet gave her daughter a winter dress or a summer dress, as the case might be. These two dresses and the gold-pieces, of which she received two others on New Year's day and on her father's fete-day, gave Eugenie a little revenue of a hundred crowns or thereabouts, which Grandet loved to see her amass. Was it not putting his money from one strong-box to another, and, as it were, training the parsimony of his heiress? from whom he sometimes demanded an account of her treasure (formerly increased by the gifts of the Bertellieres), saying: "It is to be your marriage dozen."

The "marriage dozen" is an old custom sacredly preserved and still in force in many parts of central France. In Berry and in Anjou, when a young girl marries, her family, or that of the husband, must give her a purse, in which they place, according to their means, twelve pieces, or twelve dozen pieces, or twelve hundred pieces of gold. The poorest shepherd-girl never marries without her dozen, be it only a dozen coppers. They still tell in Issoudun of a certain "dozen" presented to a rich heiress, which contained a hundred and forty-four *portugaises d'or*. Pope Clement VII., uncle of Catherine de' Medici, gave her when he

married her to Henri II. a dozen antique gold medals of priceless value.

During dinner the father, delighted to see his Eugenie looking well in a new gown, exclaimed: "As it is Eugenie's birthday let us have a fire; it will be a good omen."

"Mademoiselle will be married this year, that's certain," said la Grande Nanon, carrying away the remains of the goose, – the pheasant of tradesmen.

"I don't see any one suitable for her in Saumur," said Madame Grandet, glancing at her husband with a timid look which, considering her years, revealed the conjugal slavery under which the poor woman languished.

Grandet looked at his daughter and exclaimed gaily, —

"She is twenty-three years old to-day, the child; we must soon begin to think of it."

Eugenie and her mother silently exchanged a glance of intelligence.

Madame Grandet was a dry, thin woman, as yellow as a quince, awkward, slow, one of those women who are born to be down-trodden. She had big bones, a big nose, a big forehead, big eyes, and presented at first sight a vague resemblance to those mealy fruits that have neither savor nor succulence. Her teeth were black and few in number, her mouth was wrinkled, her chin long and pointed. She was an excellent woman, a true la Bertelliere. L'abbe Cruchot found occasional opportunity to tell her that she had not done ill; and she believed him. Angelic

sweetness, the resignation of an insect tortured by children, a rare piety, a good heart, an unalterable equanimity of soul, made her universally pitied and respected. Her husband never gave her more than six francs at a time for her personal expenses. Ridiculous as it may seem, this woman, who by her own fortune and her various inheritances brought Pere Grandet more than three hundred thousand francs, had always felt so profoundly humiliated by her dependence and the slavery in which she lived, against which the gentleness of her spirit prevented her from revolting, that she had never asked for one penny or made a single remark on the deeds which Maitre Cruchot brought for her signature. This foolish secret pride, this nobility of soul perpetually misunderstood and wounded by Grandet, ruled the whole conduct of the wife.

Madame Grandet was attired habitually in a gown of greenish levantine silk, endeavoring to make it last nearly a year; with it she wore a large kerchief of white cotton cloth, a bonnet made of plaited straws sewn together, and almost always a black-silk apron. As she seldom left the house she wore out very few shoes. She never asked anything for herself. Grandet, seized with occasional remorse when he remembered how long a time had elapsed since he gave her the last six francs, always stipulated for the "wife's pin-money" when he sold his yearly vintage. The four or five louis presented by the Belgian or the Dutchman who purchased the wine were the chief visible signs of Madame Grandet's annual revenues. But after she had received the five

louis, her husband would often say to her, as though their purse were held in common: "Can you lend me a few sous?" and the poor woman, glad to be able to do something for a man whom her confessor held up to her as her lord and master, returned him in the course of the winter several crowns out of the "pin-money." When Grandet drew from his pocket the five-franc piece which he allowed monthly for the minor expenses, – thread, needles, and toilet, – of his daughter, he never failed to say as he buttoned his breeches' pocket: "And you, mother, do you want anything?"

"My friend," Madame Grandet would answer, moved by a sense of maternal dignity, "we will see about that later."

Wasted dignity! Grandet thought himself very generous to his wife. Philosophers who meet the like of Nanon, of Madame Grandet, of Eugenie, have surely a right to say that irony is at the bottom of the ways of Providence.

After the dinner at which for the first time allusion had been made to Eugenie's marriage, Nanon went to fetch a bottle of black-currant ratafia from Monsieur Grandet's bed-chamber, and nearly fell as she came down the stairs.

"You great stupid!" said her master; "are you going to tumble about like other people, hey?"

"Monsieur, it was that step on your staircase which has given way."

"She is right," said Madame Grandet; "it ought to have been mended long ago. Yesterday Eugenie nearly twisted her ankle."

"Here," said Grandet to Nanon, seeing that she looked quite

pale, “as it is Eugenie’s birthday, and you came near falling, take a little glass of ratafia to set you right.”

“Faith! I’ve earned it,” said Nanon; “most people would have broken the bottle; but I’d sooner have broken my elbow holding it up high.”

“Poor Nanon!” said Grandet, filling a glass.

“Did you hurt yourself?” asked Eugenie, looking kindly at her.

“No, I didn’t fall; I threw myself back on my haunches.”

“Well! as it is Eugenie’s birthday,” said Grandet, “I’ll have the step mended. You people don’t know how to set your foot in the corner where the wood is still firm.”

Grandet took the candle, leaving his wife, daughter, and servant without any other light than that from the hearth, where the flames were lively, and went into the bakehouse to fetch planks, nails, and tools.

“Can I help you?” cried Nanon, hearing him hammer on the stairs.

“No, no! I’m an old hand at it,” answered the former cooper.

At the moment when Grandet was mending his worm-eaten staircase and whistling with all his might, in remembrance of the days of his youth, the three Cruchots knocked at the door.

“Is it you, Monsieur Cruchot?” asked Nanon, peeping through the little grating.

“Yes,” answered the president.

Nanon opened the door, and the light from the hearth, reflected on the ceiling, enabled the three Cruchots to find their

way into the room.

"Ha! you've come a-greeting," said Nanon, smelling the flowers.

"Excuse me, messieurs," cried Grandet, recognizing their voices; "I'll be with you in a moment. I'm not proud; I am patching up a step on my staircase."

"Go on, go on, Monsieur Grandet; a man's house is his castle," said the president sententiously.

Madame and Mademoiselle Grandet rose. The president, profiting by the darkness, said to Eugenie:

"Will you permit me, mademoiselle, to wish you, on this the day of your birth, a series of happy years and the continuance of the health which you now enjoy?"

He offered her a huge bouquet of choice flowers which were rare in Saumur; then, taking the heiress by the elbows, he kissed her on each side of her neck with a complacency that made her blush. The president, who looked like a rusty iron nail, felt that his courtship was progressing.

"Don't stand on ceremony," said Grandet, entering. "How well you do things on fete-days, Monsieur le president!"

"When it concerns mademoiselle," said the abbe, armed with his own bouquet, "every day is a fete-day for my nephew."

The abbe kissed Eugenie's hand. As for Maitre Cruchot, he boldly kissed her on both cheeks, remarking: "How we sprout up, to be sure! Every year is twelve months."

As he replaced the candlestick beside the clock, Grandet, who

never forgot his own jokes, and repeated them to satiety when he thought them funny, said, —

"As this is Eugenie's birthday let us illuminate."

He carefully took off the branches of the candelabra, put a socket on each pedestal, took from Nanon a new tallow candle with paper twisted round the end of it, put it into the hollow, made it firm, lit it, and then sat down beside his wife, looking alternately at his friends, his daughter, and the two candles. The Abbe Cruchot, a plump, puffy little man, with a red wig plastered down and a face like an old female gambler, said as he stretched out his feet, well shod in stout shoes with silver buckles: "The des Grassins have not come?"

"Not yet," said Grandet.

"But are they coming?" asked the old notary, twisting his face, which had as many holes as a collander, into a queer grimace.

"I think so," answered Madame Grandet.

"Are your vintages all finished?" said Monsieur de Bonfons to Grandet.

"Yes, all of them," said the old man, rising to walk up and down the room, his chest swelling with pride as he said the words, "all of them." Through the door of the passage which led to the kitchen he saw la Grande Nanon sitting beside her fire with a candle and preparing to spin there, so as not to intrude among the guests.

"Nanon," he said, going into the passage, "put out that fire and that candle, and come and sit with us. Pardieu! the hall is

big enough for all."

"But monsieur, you are to have the great people."

"Are not you as good as they? They are descended from Adam, and so are you."

Grandet came back to the president and said, —

"Have you sold your vintage?"

"No, not I; I shall keep it. If the wine is good this year, it will be better two years hence. The proprietors, you know, have made an agreement to keep up the price; and this year the Belgians won't get the better of us. Suppose they are sent off empty-handed for once, faith! they'll come back."

"Yes, but let us mind what we are about," said Grandet in a tone which made the president tremble.

"Is he driving some bargain?" thought Cruchot.

At this moment the knocker announced the des Grassins family, and their arrival interrupted a conversation which had begun between Madame Grandet and the abbe.

Madame des Grassins was one of those lively, plump little women, with pink-and-white skins, who, thanks to the claustral calm of the provinces and the habits of a virtuous life, keep their youth until they are past forty. She was like the last rose of autumn, – pleasant to the eye, though the petals have a certain frostiness, and their perfume is slight. She dressed well, got her fashions from Paris, set the tone to Saumur, and gave parties. Her husband, formerly a quartermaster in the Imperial guard, who had been desperately wounded at Austerlitz, and had since

retired, still retained, in spite of his respect for Grandet, the seeming frankness of an old soldier.

"Good evening, Grandet," he said, holding out his hand and affecting a sort of superiority, with which he always crushed the Cruchots. "Mademoiselle," he added, turning to Eugenie, after bowing to Madame Grandet, "you are always beautiful and good, and truly I do not know what to wish you." So saying, he offered her a little box which his servant had brought and which contained a Cape heather, – a flower lately imported into Europe and very rare.

Madame des Grassins kissed Eugenie very affectionately, pressed her hand, and said: "Adolphe wishes to make you my little offering."

A tall, blond young man, pale and slight, with tolerable manners and seemingly rather shy, although he had just spent eight or ten thousand francs over his allowance in Paris, where he had been sent to study law, now came forward and kissed Eugenie on both cheeks, offering her a workbox with utensils in silver-gilt, – mere show-case trumpery, in spite of the monogram E.G. in gothic letters rather well engraved, which belonged properly to something in better taste. As she opened it, Eugenie experienced one of those unexpected and perfect delights which make a young girl blush and quiver and tremble with pleasure. She turned her eyes to her father as if to ask permission to accept it, and Monsieur Grandet replied: "Take it, my daughter," in a tone which would have made an actor illustrious.

The three Cruchots felt crushed as they saw the joyous, animated look cast upon Adolphe des Grassins by the heiress, to whom such riches were unheard-of. Monsieur des Grassins offered Grandet a pinch of snuff, took one himself, shook off the grains as they fell on the ribbon of the Legion of honor which was attached to the button-hole of his blue surtout; then he looked at the Cruchots with an air that seemed to say, "Parry that thrust if you can!" Madame des Grassins cast her eyes on the blue vases which held the Cruchot bouquets, looking at the enemy's gifts with the pretended interest of a satirical woman. At this delicate juncture the Abbe Cruchot left the company seated in a circle round the fire and joined Grandet at the lower end of the hall. As the two men reached the embrasure of the farthest window the priest said in the miser's ear: "Those people throw money out of the windows."

"What does that matter if it gets into my cellar?" retorted the old wine-grower.

"If you want to give gilt scissors to your daughter, you have the means," said the abbe.

"I give her something better than scissors," answered Grandet.

"My nephew is a blockhead," thought the abbe as he looked at the president, whose rumpled hair added to the ill grace of his brown countenance. "Couldn't he have found some little trifle which cost money?"

"We will join you at cards, Madame Grandet," said Madame des Grassins.

"We might have two tables, as we are all here."

"As it is Eugenie's birthday you had better play loto all together," said Pere Grandet: "the two young ones can join"; and the old cooper, who never played any game, motioned to his daughter and Adolphe. "Come, Nanon, set the tables."

"We will help you, Mademoiselle Nanon," said Madame des Grassins gaily, quite joyous at the joy she had given Eugenie.

"I have never in my life been so pleased," the heiress said to her; "I have never seen anything so pretty."

"Adolphe brought it from Paris, and he chose it," Madame des Grassins whispered in her ear.

"Go on! go on! damned intriguing thing!" thought the president. "If you ever have a suit in court, you or your husband, it shall go hard with you."

The notary, sitting in his corner, looked calmly at the abbe, saying to himself: "The des Grassins may do what they like; my property and my brother's and that of my nephew amount in all to eleven hundred thousand francs. The des Grassins, at the most, have not half that; besides, they have a daughter. They may give what presents they like; heiress and presents too will be ours one of these days."

At half-past eight in the evening the two card-tables were set out. Madame des Grassins succeeded in putting her son beside Eugenie. The actors in this scene, so full of interest, commonplace as it seems, were provided with bits of pasteboard striped in many colors and numbered, and with counters of blue

glass, and they appeared to be listening to the jokes of the notary, who never drew a number without making a remark, while in fact they were all thinking of Monsieur Grandet's millions. The old cooper, with inward self-conceit, was contemplating the pink feathers and the fresh toilet of Madame des Grassins, the martial head of the banker, the faces of Adolphe, the president, the abbe, and the notary, saying to himself: —

"They are all after my money. Hey! neither the one nor the other shall have my daughter; but they are useful – useful as harpoons to fish with."

This family gaiety in the old gray room dimly lighted by two tallow candles; this laughter, accompanied by the whirr of Nanon's spinning-wheel, sincere only upon the lips of Eugenie or her mother; this triviality mingled with important interests; this young girl, who, like certain birds made victims of the price put upon them, was now lured and trapped by proofs of friendship of which she was the dupe, – all these things contributed to make the scene a melancholy comedy. Is it not, moreover, a drama of all times and all places, though here brought down to its simplest expression? The figure of Grandet, playing his own game with the false friendship of the two families and getting enormous profits from it, dominates the scene and throws light upon it. The modern god, – the only god in whom faith is preserved, – money, is here, in all its power, manifested in a single countenance. The tender sentiments of life hold here but a secondary place; only the three pure, simple hearts of Nanon, of Eugenie, and of her

mother were inspired by them. And how much of ignorance there was in the simplicity of these poor women! Eugenie and her mother knew nothing of Grandet's wealth; they could only estimate the things of life by the glimmer of their pale ideas, and they neither valued nor despised money, because they were accustomed to do without it. Their feelings, bruised, though they did not know it, but ever-living, were the secret spring of their existence, and made them curious exceptions in the midst of these other people whose lives were purely material. Frightful condition of the human race! there is no one of its joys that does not come from some species of ignorance.

At the moment when Madame Grandet had won a loto of sixteen sous, – the largest ever pooled in that house, – and while la Grande Nanon was laughing with delight as she watched madame pocketing her riches, the knocker resounded on the house-door with such a noise that the women all jumped in their chairs.

"There is no man in Saumur who would knock like that," said the notary.

"How can they bang in that way!" exclaimed Nanon; "do they want to break in the door?"

"Who the devil is it?" cried Grandet.

III

Nanon took one of the candles and went to open the door, followed by her master.

"Grandet! Grandet!" cried his wife, moved by a sudden impulse of fear, and running to the door of the room.

All the players looked at each other.

"Suppose we all go?" said Monsieur des Grassins; "that knock strikes me as evil-intentioned."

Hardly was Monsieur des Grassins allowed to see the figure of a young man, accompanied by a porter from the coach-office carrying two large trunks and dragging a carpet-bag after him, than Monsieur Grandet turned roughly on his wife and said, —

"Madame Grandet, go back to your loto; leave me to speak with monsieur."

Then he pulled the door quickly to, and the excited players returned to their seats, but did not continue the game.

"Is it any one belonging to Saumur, Monsieur des Grassins?" asked his wife.

"No, it is a traveller."

"He must have come from Paris."

"Just so," said the notary, pulling out his watch, which was two inches thick and looked like a Dutch man-of-war; "it's nine o'clock; the diligence of the Grand Bureau is never late."

"Is the gentleman young?" inquired the Abbe Cruchot.

"Yes," answered Monsieur des Grassins, "and he has brought luggage which must weigh nearly three tons."

"Nanon does not come back," said Eugenie.

"It must be one of your relations," remarked the president.

"Let us go on with our game," said Madame Grandet gently. "I know from Monsieur Grandet's tone of voice that he is annoyed; perhaps he would not like to find us talking of his affairs."

"Mademoiselle," said Adolphe to his neighbor, "it is no doubt your cousin Grandet, – a very good-looking young man; I met him at the ball of Monsieur de Nucingen." Adolphe did not go on, for his mother trod on his toes; and then, asking him aloud for two sous to put on her stake, she whispered: "Will you hold your tongue, you great goose!"

At this moment Grandet returned, without la Grande Nanon, whose steps, together with those of the porter, echoed up the staircase; and he was followed by the traveller who had excited such curiosity and so filled the lively imaginations of those present that his arrival at this dwelling, and his sudden fall into the midst of this assembly, can only be likened to that of a snail into a beehive, or the introduction of a peacock into some village poultry-yard.

"Sit down near the fire," said Grandet.

Before seating himself, the young stranger saluted the assembled company very gracefully. The men rose to answer by a courteous inclination, and the women made a ceremonious bow.

"You are cold, no doubt, monsieur," said Madame Grandet;

"you have, perhaps, travelled from – "

"Just like all women!" said the old wine-grower, looking up from a letter he was reading. "Do let monsieur rest himself!"

"But, father, perhaps monsieur would like to take something," said Eugenie.

"He has got a tongue," said the old man sternly.

The stranger was the only person surprised by this scene; all the others were well-used to the despotic ways of the master. However, after the two questions and the two replies had been exchanged, the newcomer rose, turned his back towards the fire, lifted one foot so as to warm the sole of its boot, and said to Eugenie, —

"Thank you, my cousin, but I dined at Tours. And," he added, looking at Grandet, "I need nothing; I am not even tired."

"Monsieur has come from the capital?" asked Madame des Grassins.

Monsieur Charles, – such was the name of the son of Monsieur Grandet of Paris, – hearing himself addressed, took a little eye-glass, suspended by a chain from his neck, applied it to his right eye to examine what was on the table, and also the persons sitting round it. He ogled Madame des Grassins with much impertinence, and said to her, after he had observed all he wished, —

"Yes, madame. You are playing at loto, aunt," he added. "Do not let me interrupt you, I beg; go on with your game: it is too amusing to leave."

"I was certain it was the cousin," thought Madame des Grassins, casting repeated glances at him.

"Forty-seven!" cried the old abbe. "Mark it down, Madame des Grassins. Isn't that your number?"

Monsieur des Grassins put a counter on his wife's card, who sat watching first the cousin from Paris and then Eugenie, without thinking of her loto, a prey to mournful presentiments. From time to time the young heiress glanced furtively at her cousin, and the banker's wife easily detected a *crescendo* of surprise and curiosity in her mind.

Monsieur Charles Grandet, a handsome young man of twenty-two, presented at this moment a singular contrast to the worthy provincials, who, considerably disgusted by his aristocratic manners, were all studying him with sarcastic intent. This needs an explanation. At twenty-two, young people are still so near childhood that they often conduct themselves childishly. In all probability, out of every hundred of them fully ninety-nine would have behaved precisely as Monsieur Charles Grandet was now behaving.

Some days earlier than this his father had told him to go and spend several months with his uncle at Saumur. Perhaps Monsieur Grandet was thinking of Eugenie. Charles, sent for the first time in his life into the provinces, took a fancy to make his appearance with the superiority of a man of fashion, to reduce the whole arrondissement to despair by his luxury, and to make his visit an epoch, importing into those country

regions all the refinements of Parisian life. In short, to explain it in one word, he mean to pass more time at Saumur in brushing his nails than he ever thought of doing in Paris, and to assume the extra nicety and elegance of dress which a young man of fashion often lays aside for a certain negligence which in itself is not devoid of grace. Charles therefore brought with him a complete hunting-costume, the finest gun, the best hunting-knife in the prettiest sheath to be found in all Paris. He brought his whole collection of waistcoats. They were of all kinds, – gray, black, white, scarabaeus-colored: some were shot with gold, some spangled, some *chined*; some were double-breasted and crossed like a shawl, others were straight in the collar; some had turned-over collars, some buttoned up to the top with gilt buttons. He brought every variety of collar and cravat in fashion at that epoch. He brought two of Buisson's coats and all his finest linen He brought his pretty gold toilet-set, – a present from his mother. He brought all his dandy knick-knacks, not forgetting a ravishing little desk presented to him by the most amiable of women, – amiable for him, at least, – a fine lady whom he called Annette and who at this moment was travelling, matrimonially and wearily, in Scotland, a victim to certain suspicions which required a passing sacrifice of happiness; in the desk was much pretty note-paper on which to write to her once a fortnight.

In short, it was as complete a cargo of Parisian frivolities as it was possible for him to get together, – a collection of all the implements of husbandry with which the youth of leisure tills

his life, from the little whip which helps to begin a duel, to the handsomely chased pistols which end it. His father having told him to travel alone and modestly, he had taken the coupe of the diligence all to himself, rather pleased at not having to damage a delightful travelling-carriage ordered for a journey on which he was to meet his Annette, the great lady who, etc., – whom he intended to rejoin at Baden in the following June. Charles expected to meet scores of people at his uncle's house, to hunt in his uncle's forests, – to live, in short, the usual chateau life; he did not know that his uncle was in Saumur, and had only inquired about him incidentally when asking the way to Froidfond. Hearing that he was in town, he supposed that he should find him in a suitable mansion.

In order that he might make a becoming first appearance before his uncle either at Saumur or at Froidfond, he had put on his most elegant travelling attire, simple yet exquisite, – "adorable," to use the word which in those days summed up the special perfections of a man or a thing. At Tours a hairdresser had re-curled his beautiful chestnut locks; there he changed his linen and put on a black satin cravat, which, combined with a round shirt-collar, framed his fair and smiling countenance agreeably. A travelling great-coat, only half buttoned up, nipped in his waist and disclosed a cashmere waistcoat crossed in front, beneath which was another waistcoat of white material. His watch, negligently slipped into a pocket, was fastened by a short gold chain to a buttonhole. His gray trousers, buttoned up at

the sides, were set off at the seams with patterns of black silk embroidery. He gracefully twirled a cane, whose chased gold knob did not mar the freshness of his gray gloves. And to complete all, his cap was in excellent taste. None but a Parisian, and a Parisian of the upper spheres, could thus array himself without appearing ridiculous; none other could give the harmony of self-conceit to all these fopperies, which were carried off, however, with a dashing air, – the air of a young man who has fine pistols, a sure aim, and Annette.

Now if you wish to understand the mutual amazement of the provincial party and the young Parisian; if you would clearly see the brilliance which the traveller's elegance cast among the gray shadows of the room and upon the faces of this family group, – endeavor to picture to your minds the Cruchots. All three took snuff, and had long ceased to repress the habit of snivelling or to remove the brown blotches which strewed the frills of their dingy shirts and the yellowing creases of their crumpled collars. Their flabby cravats were twisted into ropes as soon as they wound them about their throats. The enormous quantity of linen which allowed these people to have their clothing washed only once in six months, and to keep it during that time in the depths of their closets, also enabled time to lay its grimy and decaying stains upon it. There was perfect unison of ill-grace and senility about them; their faces, as faded as their threadbare coats, as creased as their trousers, were worn-out, shrivelled-up, and puckered. As for the others, the general negligence of their dress, which

was incomplete and wanting in freshness, – like the toilet of all country places, where insensibly people cease to dress for others and come to think seriously of the price of a pair of gloves, – was in keeping with the negligence of the Cruchots. A horror of fashion was the only point on which the Grassinists and the Cruchotines agreed.

When the Parisian took up his eye-glass to examine the strange accessories of this dwelling, – the joists of the ceiling, the color of the woodwork, and the specks which the flies had left there in sufficient number to punctuate the "Moniteur" and the "Encyclopaedia of Sciences," – the loto-players lifted their noses and looked at him with as much curiosity as they might have felt about a giraffe. Monsieur des Grassins and his son, to whom the appearance of a man of fashion was not wholly unknown, were nevertheless as much astonished as their neighbors, whether it was that they fell under the indefinable influence of the general feeling, or that they really shared it as with satirical glances they seemed to say to their compatriots, —

"That is what you see in Paris!"

They were able to examine Charles at their leisure without fearing to displease the master of the house. Grandet was absorbed in the long letter which he held in his hand; and to read it he had taken the only candle upon the card-table, paying no heed to his guests or their pleasure. Eugenie, to whom such a type of perfection, whether of dress or of person, was absolutely unknown, thought she beheld in her cousin a being descended

from seraphic spheres. She inhaled with delight the fragrance wafted from the graceful curls of that brilliant head. She would have liked to touch the soft kid of the delicate gloves. She envied Charles his small hands, his complexion, the freshness and refinement of his features. In short, – if it is possible to sum up the effect this elegant being produced upon an ignorant young girl perpetually employed in darning stockings or in mending her father's clothes, and whose life flowed on beneath these unclean rafters, seeing none but occasional passers along the silent street, – this vision of her cousin roused in her soul an emotion of delicate desire like that inspired in a young man by the fanciful pictures of women drawn by Westall for the English "Keepsakes," and that engraved by the Findens with so clever a tool that we fear, as we breathe upon the paper, that the celestial apparitions may be wafted away. Charles drew from his pocket a handkerchief embroidered by the great lady now travelling in Scotland. As Eugenie saw this pretty piece of work, done in the vacant hours which were lost to love, she looked at her cousin to see if it were possible that he meant to make use of it. The manners of the young man, his gestures, the way in which he took up his eye-glass, his affected superciliousness, his contemptuous glance at the coffer which had just given so much pleasure to the rich heiress, and which he evidently regarded as without value, or even as ridiculous, – all these things, which shocked the Cruchots and the des Grassins, pleased Eugenie so deeply that before she slept she dreamed long dreams of her phoenix cousin.

The loto-numbers were drawn very slowly, and presently the game came suddenly to an end. La Grand Nanon entered and said aloud: “Madame, I want the sheets for monsieur’s bed.”

Madame Grandet followed her out. Madame des Grassins said in a low voice: “Let us keep our sous and stop playing.” Each took his or her two sous from the chipped saucer in which they had been put; then the party moved in a body toward the fire.

“Have you finished your game?” said Grandet, without looking up from his letter.

“Yes, yes!” replied Madame des Grassins, taking a seat near Charles.

Eugenie, prompted by a thought often born in the heart of a young girl when sentiment enters it for the first time, left the room to go and help her mother and Nanon. Had an able confessor then questioned her she would, no doubt, have avowed to him that she thought neither of her mother nor of Nanon, but was pricked by a poignant desire to look after her cousin’s room and concern herself with her cousin; to supply what might be needed, to remedy any forgetfulness, to see that all was done to make it, as far as possible, suitable and elegant; and, in fact, she arrived in time to prove to her mother and Nanon that everything still remained to be done. She put into Nanon’s head the notion of passing a warming-pan between the sheets. She herself covered the old table with a cloth and requested Nanon to change it every morning; she convinced her mother that it was necessary to light a good fire, and persuaded Nanon to bring up a great pile of wood

into the corridor without saying anything to her father. She ran to get, from one of the corner-shelves of the hall, a tray of old lacquer which was part of the inheritance of the late Monsieur de la Bertelliere, catching up at the same time a six-sided crystal goblet, a little tarnished gilt spoon, an antique flask engraved with cupids, all of which she put triumphantly on the corner of her cousin's chimney-piece. More ideas surged through her head in one quarter of an hour than she had ever had since she came into the world.

"Mamma," she said, "my cousin will never bear the smell of a tallow candle; suppose we buy a wax one?" And she darted, swift as a bird, to get the five-franc piece which she had just received for her monthly expenses. "Here, Nanon," she cried, "quick!"

"What will your father say?" This terrible remonstrance was uttered by Madame Grandet as she beheld her daughter armed with an old Sevres sugar-basin which Grandet had brought home from the chateau of Froidfond. "And where will you get the sugar? Are you crazy?"

"Mamma, Nanon can buy some sugar as well as the candle."

"But your father?"

"Surely his nephew ought not to go without a glass of *eau sucree*? Besides, he will not notice it."

"Your father sees everything," said Madame Grandet, shaking her head.

Nanon hesitated; she knew her master.

"Come, Nanon, go, – because it is my birthday."

Nanon gave a loud laugh as she heard the first little jest her young mistress had ever made, and then obeyed her.

While Eugenie and her mother were trying to embellish the bedroom assigned by Monsieur Grandet for his nephew, Charles himself was the object of Madame des Grassins' attentions; to all appearances she was setting her cap at him.

"You are very courageous, monsieur," she said to the young dandy, "to leave the pleasures of the capital at this season and take up your abode in Saumur. But if we do not frighten you away, you will find there are some amusements even here."

She threw him the ogling glance of the provinces, where women put so much prudence and reserve into their eyes that they impart to them the prudish concupiscence peculiar to certain ecclesiastics to whom all pleasure is either a theft or an error. Charles was so completely out of his element in this abode, and so far from the vast chateau and the sumptuous life with which his fancy had endowed his uncle, that as he looked at Madame des Grassins he perceived a dim likeness to Parisian faces. He gracefully responded to the species of invitation addressed to him, and began very naturally a conversation, in which Madame des Grassins gradually lowered her voice so as to bring it into harmony with the nature of the confidences she was making. With her, as with Charles, there was the need of conference; so after a few moments spent in coquettish phrases and a little serious jesting, the clever provincial said, thinking herself unheard by the others, who were discussing the sale of wines

which at that season filled the heads of every one in Saumur, —

"Monsieur if you will do us the honor to come and see us, you will give as much pleasure to my husband as to myself. Our salon is the only one in Saumur where you will find the higher business circles mingling with the nobility. We belong to both societies, who meet at our house simply because they find it amusing. My husband – I say it with pride – is as much valued by the one class as by the other. We will try to relieve the monotony of your visit here. If you stay all the time with Monsieur Grandet, good heavens! what will become of you? Your uncle is a sordid miser who thinks of nothing but his vines; your aunt is a pious soul who can't put two ideas together; and your cousin is a little fool, without education, perfectly common, no fortune, who will spend her life in darning towels."

"She is really very nice, this woman," thought Charles Grandet as he duly responded to Madame des Grassins' coquetries.

"It seems to me, wife, that you are taking possession of monsieur," said the stout banker, laughing.

On this remark the notary and the president said a few words that were more or less significant; but the abbe, looking at them slyly, brought their thoughts to a focus by taking a pinch of snuff and saying as he handed round his snuff-box: "Who can do the honors of Saumur for monsieur so well as madame?"

"Ah! what do you mean by that, monsieur l'abbe?" demanded Monsieur des Grassins.

"I mean it in the best possible sense for you, for madame, for

the town of Saumur, and for monsieur," said the wily old man, turning to Charles.

The Abbe Cruchot had guessed the conversation between Charles and Madame des Grassins without seeming to pay attention to it.

"Monsieur," said Adolphe to Charles with an air which he tried to make free and easy, "I don't know whether you remember me, but I had the honor of dancing as your *vis-a-vis* at a ball given by the Baron de Nucingen, and – "

"Perfectly; I remember perfectly, monsieur," answered Charles, pleased to find himself the object of general attention.

"Monsieur is your son?" he said to Madame des Grassins.

The abbe looked at her maliciously.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered.

"Then you were very young when you were in Paris?" said Charles, addressing Adolphe.

"You must know, monsieur," said the abbe, "that we send them to Babylon as soon as they are weaned."

Madame des Grassins examined the abbe with a glance of extreme penetration.

"It is only in the provinces," he continued, "that you will find women of thirty and more years as fresh as madame, here, with a son about to take his degree. I almost fancy myself back in the days when the young men stood on chairs in the ball-room to see you dance, madame," said the abbe, turning to his female adversary. "To me, your triumphs are but of yesterday – "

"The old rogue!" thought Madame Grassins; "can he have guessed my intentions?"

"It seems that I shall have a good deal of success in Saumur," thought Charles as he unbuttoned his great-coat, put a hand into his waistcoat, and cast a glance into the far distance, to imitate the attitude which Chantrey has given to Lord Byron.

The inattention of Pere Grandet, or, to speak more truly, the preoccupation of mind into which the reading of the letter had plunged him, did not escape the vigilance of the notary and the president, who tried to guess the contents of the letter by the almost imperceptible motions of the miser's face, which was then under the full light of the candle. He maintained the habitual calm of his features with evident difficulty; we may, in fact, picture to ourselves the countenance such a man endeavored to preserve as he read the fatal letter which here follows: —

> My Brother, – It is almost twenty-three years since we have seen each other. My marriage was the occasion of our last interview, after which we parted, and both of us were happy. Assuredly I could not then foresee that you would one day be the prop of the family whose prosperity you then predicted.
>
> When you hold this letter within your hands I shall be no longer living. In the position I now hold I cannot survive the disgrace of bankruptcy. I have waited on the edge of the gulf until the last moment, hoping to save myself. The end has come, I must sink into it. The double bankruptcies of my broker and of Roguin, my notary, have carried off

my last resources and left me nothing. I have the bitterness of owing nearly four millions, with assets not more than twenty-five per cent in value to pay them. The wines in my warehouses suffer from the fall in prices caused by the abundance and quality of your vintage. In three days Paris will cry out: "Monsieur Grandet was a knave!" and I, an honest man, shall be lying in my winding-sheet of infamy. I deprive my son of a good name, which I have stained, and the fortune of his mother, which I have lost. He knows nothing of all this, – my unfortunate child whom I idolize! We parted tenderly. He was ignorant, happily, that the last beatings of my heart were spent in that farewell. Will he not some day curse me? My brother, my brother! the curses of our children are horrible; they can appeal against ours, but theirs are irrevocable. Grandet, you are my elder brother, you owe me your protection; act for me so that Charles may cast no bitter words upon my grave! My brother, if I were writing with my blood, with my tears, no greater anguish could I put into this letter, – nor as great, for then I should weep, I should bleed, I should die, I should suffer no more, but now I suffer and look at death with dry eyes.

From henceforth you are my son's father; he has no relations, as you well know, on his mother's side. Why did I not consider social prejudices? Why did I yield to love? Why did I marry the natural daughter of a great lord? Charles has no family. Oh, my unhappy son! my son! Listen, Grandet! I implore nothing for myself, – besides, your property may not be large enough to carry a mortgage of three millions, – but for my son! Brother, my suppliant hands are clasped as

I think of you; behold them! Grandet, I confide my son to you in dying, and I look at the means of death with less pain as I think that you will be to him a father. He loved me well, my Charles; I was good to him, I never thwarted him; he will not curse me. Ah, you see! he is gentle, he is like his mother, he will cause you no grief. Poor boy! accustomed to all the enjoyments of luxury, he knows nothing of the privations to which you and I were condemned by the poverty of our youth. And I leave him ruined! alone! Yes, all my friends will avoid him, and it is I who have brought this humiliation upon him! Would that I had the force to send him with one thrust into the heavens to his mother's side! Madness! I come back to my disaster – to his. I send him to you that you may tell him in some fitting way of my death, of his future fate. Be a father to him, but a good father. Do not tear him all at once from his idle life, it would kill him. I beg him on my knees to renounce all rights that, as his mother's heir, he may have on my estate. But the prayer is superfluous; he is honorable, and he will feel that he must not appear among my creditors. Bring him to see this at the right time; reveal to him the hard conditions of the life I have made for him: and if he still has tender thoughts of me, tell him in my name that all is not lost for him. Yes, work, labor, which saved us both, may give him back the fortune of which I have deprived him; and if he listens to his father's voice as it reaches him from the grave, he will go the Indies. My brother, Charles is an upright and courageous young man; give him the wherewithal to make his venture; he will die sooner than not repay you the funds

which you may lend him. Grandet! if you will not do this, you will lay up for yourself remorse. Ah, should my child find neither tenderness nor succor in you, I would call down the vengeance of God upon your cruelty!

If I had been able to save something from the wreck, I might have had the right to leave him at least a portion of his mother's property; but my last monthly payments have absorbed everything. I did not wish to die uncertain of my child's fate; I hoped to feel a sacred promise in a clasp of your hand which might have warmed my heart: but time fails me. While Charles is journeying to you I shall be preparing my assignment. I shall endeavor to show by the order and good faith of my accounts that my disaster comes neither from a faulty life nor from dishonesty. It is for my son's sake that I strive to do this.

Farewell, my brother! May the blessing of God be yours for the generous guardianship I lay upon you, and which, I doubt not, you will accept. A voice will henceforth and forever pray for you in that world where we must all go, and where I am now as you read these lines.

Victor-Ange-Guillaume Grandet.

"So you are talking?" said Pere Grandet as he carefully folded the letter in its original creases and put it into his waistcoat-pocket. He looked at his nephew with a humble, timid air, beneath which he hid his feelings and his calculations. "Have you warmed yourself?" he said to him.

"Thoroughly, my dear uncle."

"Well, where are the women?" said his uncle, already

forgetting that his nephew was to sleep at the house. At this moment Eugenie and Madame Grandet returned.

"Is the room all ready?" said Grandet, recovering his composure.

"Yes, father."

"Well then, my nephew, if you are tired, Nanon shall show you your room. It isn't a dandy's room; but you will excuse a poor wine-grower who never has a penny to spare. Taxes swallow up everything."

"We do not wish to intrude, Grandet," said the banker; "you may want to talk to your nephew, and therefore we will bid you good-night."

At these words the assembly rose, and each made a parting bow in keeping with his or her own character. The old notary went to the door to fetch his lantern and came back to light it, offering to accompany the des Grassins on their way. Madame des Grassins had not foreseen the incident which brought the evening prematurely to an end, her servant therefore had not arrived.

"Will you do me the honor to take my arm, madame?" said the abbe.

"Thank you, monsieur l'abbe, but I have my son," she answered dryly.

"Ladies cannot compromise themselves with me," said the abbe.

"Take Monsieur Cruchot's arm," said her husband.

The abbe walked off with the pretty lady so quickly that they were soon some distance in advance of the caravan.

"That is a good-looking young man, madame," he said, pressing her arm. "Good-by to the grapes, the vintage is done. It is all over with us. We may as well say adieu to Mademoiselle Grandet. Eugenie will belong to the dandy. Unless this cousin is enamoured of some Parisian woman, your son Adolphe will find another rival in – "

"Not at all, monsieur l'abbe. This young man cannot fail to see that Eugenie is a little fool, – a girl without the least freshness. Did you notice her to-night? She was as yellow as a quince."

"Perhaps you made the cousin notice it?"

"I did not take the trouble – "

"Place yourself always beside Eugenie, madame, and you need never take the trouble to say anything to the young man against his cousin; he will make his own comparisons, which – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.