HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE ALKAHEST

Оноре де Бальзак

The Alkahest

де Бальзак О.

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Содержание

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DEDICATION

To Madame Josephine Delannoy nee Doumerc.

Madame, may God grant that this, my book, may live longer than I, for then the gratitude which I owe to you, and which I hope will equal your almost maternal kindness to me, would last beyond the limits prescribed for human affection. This sublime privilege of prolonging life in our hearts for a time by the life of the work we leave behind us would be (if we could only be sure of gaining it at last) a reward indeed for all the labor undertaken by those who aspire to such an immortality.

Yet again I say – May God grant it!

DE BALZAC.

CHAPTER I

There is a house at Douai in the rue de Paris, whose aspect, interior arrangements, and details have preserved, to a greater degree than those of other domiciles, the characteristics of the old Flemish buildings, so naively adapted to the patriarchal manners and customs of that excellent land. Before describing this house it may be well, in the interest of other writers, to explain the necessity for such didactic preliminaries, – since they have roused a protest from certain ignorant and voracious readers who want emotions without undergoing the generating process, the flower without the seed, the child without gestation. Is Art supposed to have higher powers than Nature?

The events of human existence, whether public or private, are so closely allied to architecture that the majority of observers can reconstruct nations and individuals, in their habits and ways of life, from the remains of public monuments or the relics of a home. Archaeology is to social nature what comparative anatomy is to organized nature. A mosaic tells the tale of a society, as the skeleton of an ichthyosaurus opens up a creative epoch. All things are linked together, and all are therefore deducible. Causes suggest effects, effects lead back to causes. Science resuscitates even the warts of the past ages.

Hence the keen interest inspired by an architectural description, provided the imagination of the writer does not distort essential facts. The mind is enabled by rigid deduction to link it with the past; and to man, the past is singularly like the future; tell him what has been, and you seldom fail to show him what will be. It is rare indeed that the picture of a locality where lives are lived does not recall to some their dawning hopes, to others their wasted faith. The comparison between a present which disappoints man's secret wishes and a future which may realize them, is an inexhaustible source of sadness or of placid content.

Thus, it is almost impossible not to feel a certain tender sensibility over a picture of Flemish life, if the accessories are clearly given. Why so? Perhaps, among other forms of existence, it offers the best conclusion to man's uncertainties. It has its social festivities, its family ties, and the easy affluence which proves the stability of its comfortable well-being; it does not lack repose amounting almost to beatitude; but, above all, it expresses the calm monotony of a frankly sensuous happiness, where enjoyment stifles desire by anticipating it. Whatever value a passionate soul may attach to the tumultuous life of feeling, it never sees without emotion the symbols of this Flemish nature, where the throbbings of the heart are so well regulated that superficial minds deny the heart's existence. The crowd prefers the abnormal force which overflows to that which moves with steady persistence. The world has neither time nor patience to realize the immense power concealed beneath an appearance of uniformity. Therefore, to impress this multitude carried away on the current of existence, passion, like a great artist, is compelled to go beyond the mark, to exaggerate, as did Michael Angelo, Bianca Capello, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, Beethoven, and Paganini. Far-seeing minds alone disapprove such excess, and respect only the energy represented by a finished execution whose perfect quiet charms superior men. The life of this essentially thrifty people amply fulfils the conditions of happiness which the masses desire as the lot of the average citizen.

A refined materialism is stamped on all the habits of Flemish life. English comfort is harsh in tone and arid in color; whereas the old-fashioned Flemish interiors rejoice the eye with their mellow tints, and the feelings with their genuine heartiness. There, work implies no weariness, and the pipe is a happy adaptation of Neapolitan "far-niente." Thence comes the peaceful sentiment in Art (its most essential condition), patience, and the element which renders its creations durable, namely, conscience. Indeed, the Flemish character lies in the two words, patience and conscience; words which seem at first to exclude the richness of poetic light and shade, and to make the manners and customs of the country as flat as its vast plains, as cold as its foggy skies. And yet it is not so. Civilization has brought her power to bear, and has modified all things, even the effects of climate. If we observe

attentively the productions of various parts of the globe, we are surprised to find that the prevailing tints from the temperate zones are gray or fawn, while the more brilliant colors belong to the products of the hotter climates. The manners and customs of a country must naturally conform to this law of nature.

Flanders, which in former times was essentially dun-colored and monotonous in tint, learned the means of irradiating its smoky atmosphere through its political vicissitudes, which brought it under the successive dominion of Burgundy, Spain, and France, and threw it into fraternal relations with Germany and Holland. From Spain it acquired the luxury of scarlet dyes and shimmering satins, tapestries of vigorous design, plumes, mandolins, and courtly bearing. In exchange for its linen and its laces, it brought from Venice that fairy glass-ware in which wine sparkles and seems the mellower. From Austria it learned the ponderous diplomacy which, to use a popular saying, takes three steps backward to one forward; while its trade with India poured into it the grotesque designs of China and the marvels of Japan.

And yet, in spite of its patience in gathering such treasures, its tenacity in parting with no possession once gained, its endurance of all things, Flanders was considered nothing more than the general storehouse of Europe, until the day when the discovery of tobacco brought into one smoky outline the scattered features of its national physiognomy. Thenceforth, and notwithstanding the parcelling out of their territory, the Flemings became a people homogeneous through their pipes and beer.[1]

After assimilating, by constant sober regulation of conduct, the products and the ideas of its masters and its neighbors, this country of Flanders, by nature so tame and devoid of poetry, worked out for itself an original existence, with characteristic manners and customs which bear no signs of servile imitation. Art stripped off its ideality and produced form alone. We may seek in vain for plastic grace, the swing of comedy, dramatic action, musical genius, or the bold flight of ode and epic. On the other hand, the people are fertile in discoveries, and trained to scientific discussions which demand time and the midnight oil. All things bear the ear-mark of temporal enjoyment. There men look exclusively to the thing that is: their thoughts are so scrupulously bent on supplying the wants of this life that they have never risen, in any direction, above the level of this present earth. The sole idea they have ever conceived of the future is that of a thrifty, prosaic statecraft: their revolutionary vigor came from a domestic desire to live as they liked, with their elbows on the table, and to take their ease under the projecting roofs of their own porches.

The consciousness of well-being and the spirit of independence which comes of prosperity begot in Flanders, sooner than elsewhere, that craving for liberty which, later, permeated all Europe. Thus the compactness of their ideas, and the tenacity which education grafted on their nature made the Flemish people a formidable body of men in the defence of their rights. Among them nothing is half-done, – neither houses, furniture, dikes, husbandry, nor revolutions; and they hold a monopoly of all that they undertake. The manufacture of linen, and that of lace, a work of patient agriculture and still more patient industry, are hereditary like their family fortunes. If we were asked to show in human form the purest specimen of solid stability, we could do no better than point to a portrait of some old burgomaster, capable, as was proved again and again, of dying in a commonplace way, and without the incitements of glory, for the welfare of his Free-town.

Yet we shall find a tender and poetic side to this patriarchal life, which will come naturally to the surface in the description of an ancient house which, at the period when this history begins, was one of the last in Douai to preserve the old-time characteristics of Flemish life.

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[1] Flanders was parcelled into three divisions; of which Eastern Flanders, capital Ghent, and Western Flanders, capital Bruges, are two provinces of Belgium. French Flanders, capital Lille, is the Departement du Nord of France. Douai, about twenty miles from Lille, is the chief town of the arrondissement du Nord.

Of all the towns in the Departement du Nord, Douai is, alas, the most modernized: there the innovating spirit has made the greatest strides, and the love of social progress is the most diffused. There the old buildings are daily disappearing, and the manners and customs of a venerable past are being rapidly obliterated. Parisian ideas and fashions and modes of life now rule the day, and soon nothing will be left of that ancient Flemish life but the warmth of its hospitality, its traditional Spanish courtesy, and the wealth and cleanliness of Holland. Mansions of white stone are replacing the old brick buildings, and the cosy comfort of Batavian interiors is fast yielding before the capricious elegance of Parisian novelties.

The house in which the events of this history occurred stands at about the middle of the rue de Paris, and has been known at Douai for more than two centuries as the House of Claes. The Van Claes were formerly one of the great families of craftsmen to whom, in various lines of production, the Netherlands owed a commercial supremacy which it has never lost. For a long period of time the Claes lived at Ghent, and were, from generation to generation, the syndics of the powerful Guild of Weavers. When the great city revolted under Charles V., who tried to suppress its privileges, the head of the Claes family was so deeply compromised in the rebellion that, foreseeing a catastrophe and bound to share the fate of his associates, he secretly sent wife, children, and property to France before the Emperor invested the town. The syndic's forebodings were justified. Together with other burghers who were excluded from the capitulation, he was hanged as a rebel, though he was, in reality, the defender of the liberties of Ghent.

The death of Claes and his associates bore fruit. Their needless execution cost the King of Spain the greater part of his possessions in the Netherlands. Of all the seed sown in the earth, the blood of martyrs gives the quickest harvest. When Philip the Second, who punished revolt through two generations, stretched his iron sceptre over Douai, the Claes preserved their great wealth by allying themselves in marriage with the very noble family of Molina, whose elder branch, then poor, thus became rich enough to buy the county of Nourho which they had long held titularly in the kingdom of Leon.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after vicissitudes which are of no interest to our present purpose, the family of Claes was represented at Douai in the person of Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina, Comte de Nourho, who preferred to be called simply Balthazar Claes. Of the immense fortune amassed by his ancestors, who had kept in motion over a thousand looms, there remained to him some fifteen thousand francs a year from landed property in the arrondissement of Douai, and the house in the rue de Paris, whose furniture in itself was a fortune. As to the family possessions in Leon, they had been in litigation between the Molinas of Douai and the branch of the family which remained in Spain. The Molinas of Leon won the domain and assumed the title of Comtes de Nourho, though the Claes alone had a legal right to it. But the pride of a Belgian burgher was superior to the haughty arrogance of Castile: after the civil rights were instituted, Balthazar Claes cast aside the ragged robes of his Spanish nobility for his more illustrious descent from the Ghent martyr.

The patriotic sentiment was so strongly developed in the families exiled under Charles V. that, to the very close of the eighteenth century, the Claes remained faithful to the manners and customs and traditions of their ancestors. They married into none but the purest burgher families, and required a certain number of aldermen and burgomasters in the pedigree of every bride-elect before admitting her to the family. They sought their wives in Bruges or Ghent, in Liege or in Holland; so that the time-honored domestic customs might be perpetuated around their hearthstones. This social group became more and more restricted, until, at the close of the last century, it mustered only some seven or eight families of the parliamentary nobility, whose manners and flowing robes of office and magisterial gravity (partly Spanish) harmonized well with the habits of their life.

The inhabitants of Douai held the family in a religious esteem that was well-nigh superstition. The sturdy honesty, the untainted loyalty of the Claes, their unfailing decorum of manners and conduct, made them the objects of a reverence which found expression in the name, – the House of

Claes. The whole spirit of ancient Flanders breathed in that mansion, which afforded to the lovers of burgher antiquities a type of the modest houses which the wealthy craftsmen of the Middle Ages constructed for their homes.

The chief ornament of the facade was an oaken door, in two sections, studded with nails driven in the pattern of a quineunx, in the centre of which the Claes pride had carved a pair of shuttles. The recess of the doorway, which was built of freestone, was topped by a pointed arch bearing a little shrine surmounted by a cross, in which was a statuette of Sainte-Genevieve plying her distaff. Though time had left its mark upon the delicate workmanship of portal and shrine, the extreme care taken of it by the servants of the house allowed the passers-by to note all its details.

The casing of the door, formed by fluted pilasters, was dark gray in color, and so highly polished that it shone as if varnished. On either side of the doorway, on the ground-floor, were two windows, which resembled all the other windows of the house. The casing of white stone ended below the sill in a richly carved shell, and rose above the window in an arch, supported at its apex by the head-piece of a cross, which divided the glass sashes in four unequal parts; for the transversal bar, placed at the height of that in a Latin cross, made the lower sashes of the window nearly double the height of the upper, the latter rounding at the sides into the arch. The coping of the arch was ornamented with three rows of brick, placed one above the other, the bricks alternately projecting or retreating to the depth of an inch, giving the effect of a Greek moulding. The glass panes, which were small and diamond-shaped, were set in very slender leading, painted red. The walls of the house, of brick jointed with white mortar, were braced at regular distances, and at the angles of the house, by stone courses.

The first floor was pierced by five windows, the second by three, while the attic had only one large circular opening in five divisions, surrounded by a freestone moulding and placed in the centre of the triangular pediment defined by the gable-roof, like the rose-window of a cathedral. At the peak was a vane in the shape of a weaver's shuttle threaded with flax. Both sides of the large triangular pediment which formed the wall of the gable were dentelled squarely into something like steps, as low down as the string-course of the upper floor, where the rain from the roof fell to right and left of the house through the jaws of a fantastic gargoyle. A freestone foundation projected like a step at the base of the house; and on either side of the entrance, between the two windows, was a trap-door, clamped by heavy iron bands, through which the cellars were entered, – a last vestige of ancient usages.

From the time the house was built, this facade had been carefully cleaned twice a year. If a little mortar fell from between the bricks, the crack was instantly filled up. The sashes, the sills, the copings, were dusted oftener than the most precious sculptures in the Louvre. The front of the house bore no signs of decay; notwithstanding the deepened color which age had given to the bricks, it was as well preserved as a choice old picture, or some rare book cherished by an amateur, which would be ever new were it not for the blistering of our climate and the effect of gases, whose pernicious breath threatens our own health.

The cloudy skies and humid atmosphere of Flanders, and the shadows produced by the narrowness of the street, sometimes diminished the brilliancy which the old house derived from its cleanliness; moreover, the very care bestowed upon it made it rather sad and chilling to the eye. A poet might have wished some leafage about the shrine, a little moss in the crevices of the freestone, a break in the even courses of the brick; he would have longed for a swallow to build her nest in the red coping that roofed the arches of the windows. The precise and immaculate air of this facade, a little worn by perpetual rubbing, gave the house a tone of severe propriety and estimable decency which would have driven a romanticist out of the neighborhood, had he happened to take lodgings over the way.

When a visitor had pulled the braided iron wire bell-cord which hung from the top of the pilaster of the doorway, and the servant-woman, coming from within, had admitted him through the side of the double-door in which was a small grated loop-hole, that half of the door escaped from her hand and swung back by its own weight with a solemn, ponderous sound that echoed along the

roof of a wide paved archway and through the depths of the house, as though the door had been of iron. This archway, painted to resemble marble, always clean and daily sprinkled with fresh sand, led into a large court-yard paved with smooth square stones of a greenish color. On the left were the linen-rooms, kitchens, and servants' hall; to the right, the wood-house, coal-house, and offices, whose doors, walls, and windows were decorated with designs kept exquisitely clean. The daylight, threading its way between four red walls chequered with white lines, caught rosy tints and reflections which gave a mysterious grace and fantastic appearance to faces, and even to trifling details.

A second house, exactly like the building on the street, and called in Flanders the "back-quarter," stood at the farther end of the court-yard, and was used exclusively as the family dwelling. The first room on the ground-floor was a parlor, lighted by two windows on the court-yard, and two more looking out upon a garden which was of the same size as the house. Two glass doors, placed exactly opposite to each other, led at one end of the room to the garden, at the other to the court-yard, and were in line with the archway and the street door; so that a visitor entering the latter could see through to the greenery which draped the lower end of the garden. The front building, which was reserved for receptions and the lodging-rooms of guests, held many objects of art and accumulated wealth, but none of them equalled in the eyes of a Claes, nor indeed in the judgment of a connoisseur, the treasures contained in the parlor, where for over two centuries the family life had glided on.

The Claes who died for the liberties of Ghent, and who might in these days be thought a mere ordinary craftsman if the historian omitted to say that he possessed over forty thousand silver marks, obtained by the manufacture of sail-cloth for the all-powerful Venetian navy, – this Claes had a friend in the famous sculptor in wood, Van Huysum of Bruges. The artist had dipped many a time into the purse of the rich craftsman. Some time before the rebellion of the men of Ghent, Van Huysum, grown rich himself, had secretly carved for his friend a wall-decoration in ebony, representing the chief scenes in the life of Van Artevelde, – that brewer of Ghent who, for a brief hour, was King of Flanders. This wall-covering, of which there were no less than sixty panels, contained about fourteen hundred principal figures, and was held to be Van Huysum's masterpiece. The officer appointed to guard the burghers whom Charles V. determined to hang when he re-entered his native town, proposed, it is said, to Van Claes to let him escape if he would give him Van Huysum's great work; but the weaver had already despatched it to Douai.

The parlor, whose walls were entirely panelled with this carving, which Van Huysum, out of regard for the martyr's memory, came to Douai to frame in wood painted in lapis-lazuli with threads of gold, is therefore the most complete work of this master, whose least carvings now sell for nearly their weight in gold. Hanging over the fire-place, Van Claes the martyr, painted by Titian in his robes as president of the Court of Parchons, still seemed the head of the family, who venerated him as their greatest man. The chimney-piece, originally in stone with a very high mantle-shelf, had been made over in marble during the last century; on it now stood an old clock and two candlesticks with five twisted branches, in bad taste, but of solid silver. The four windows were draped by wide curtains of red damask with a flowered black design, lined with white silk; the furniture, covered with the same material, had been renovated in the time of Louis XIV. The floor, evidently modern, was laid in large squares of white wood bordered with strips of oak. The ceiling, formed of many oval panels, in each of which Van Huysum had carved a grotesque mask, had been respected and allowed to keep the brown tones of the native Dutch oak.

In the four corners of this parlor were truncated columns, supporting candelabra exactly like those on the mantle-shelf; and a round table stood in the middle of the room. Along the walls card-tables were symmetrically placed. On two gilded consoles with marble slabs there stood, at the period when this history begins, two glass globes filled with water, in which, above a bed of sand and shells, red and gold and silver fish were swimming about. The room was both brilliant and sombre. The ceiling necessarily absorbed the light and reflected none. Although on the garden side all was bright and glowing, and the sunshine danced upon the ebony carvings, the windows on the court-

yard admitted so little light that the gold threads in the lapis-lazuli scarcely glittered on the opposite wall. This parlor, which could be gorgeous on a fine day, was usually, under the Flemish skies, filled with soft shadows and melancholy russet tones, like those shed by the sun on the tree-tops of the forests in autumn.

It is unnecessary to continue this description of the House of Claes, in other parts of which many scenes of this history will occur: at present, it is enough to make known its general arrangement.

CHAPTER II

Towards the end of August, 1812, on a Sunday evening after vespers, a woman was sitting in a deep armchair placed before one of the windows looking out upon the garden. The sun's rays fell obliquely upon the house and athwart the parlor, breaking into fantastic lights on the carved panellings of the wall, and wrapping the woman in a crimson halo projected through the damask curtains which draped the window. Even an ordinary painter, had he sketched this woman at this particular moment, would assuredly have produced a striking picture of a head that was full of pain and melancholy. The attitude of the body, and that of the feet stretched out before her, showed the prostration of one who loses consciousness of physical being in the concentration of powers absorbed in a fixed idea: she was following its gleams in the far future, just as sometimes on the shores of the sea, we gaze at a ray of sunlight which pierces the clouds and draws a luminous line to the horizon.

The hands of this woman hung nerveless outside the arms of her chair, and her head, as if too heavy to hold up, lay back upon its cushions. A dress of white cambric, very full and flowing, hindered any judgment as to the proportions of her figure, and the bust was concealed by the folds of a scarf crossed on the bosom and negligently knotted. If the light had not thrown into relief her face, which she seemed to show in preference to the rest of her person, it would still have been impossible to escape riveting the attention exclusively upon it. Its expression of stupefaction, which was cold and rigid despite hot tears that were rolling from her eyes, would have struck the most thoughtless mind. Nothing is more terrible to behold than excessive grief that is rarely allowed to break forth, of which traces were left on this woman's face like lava congealed about a crater. She might have been a dying mother compelled to leave her children in abysmal depths of wretchedness, unable to bequeath them to any human protector.

The countenance of this lady, then about forty years of age and not nearly so far from handsome as she had been in her youth, bore none of the characteristics of a Flemish woman. Her thick black hair fell in heavy curls upon her shoulders and about her cheeks. The forehead, very prominent, and narrow at the temples, was yellow in tint, but beneath it sparkled two black eyes that were capable of emitting flames. Her face, altogether Spanish, dark skinned, with little color and pitted by the small-pox, attracted the eye by the beauty of its oval, whose outline, though slightly impaired by time, preserved a finished elegance and dignity, and regained at times its full perfection when some effort of the soul restored its pristine purity. The most noticeable feature in this strong face was the nose, aquiline as the beak of an eagle, and so sharply curved at the middle as to give the idea of an interior malformation; yet there was an air of indescribable delicacy about it, and the partition between the nostrils was so thin that a rosy light shone through it. Though the lips, which were large and curved, betrayed the pride of noble birth, their expression was one of kindliness and natural courtesy.

The beauty of this vigorous yet feminine face might indeed be questioned, but the face itself commanded attention. Short, deformed, and lame, this woman remained all the longer unmarried because the world obstinately refused to credit her with gifts of mind. Yet there were men who were deeply stirred by the passionate ardor of that face and its tokens of ineffable tenderness, and who remained under a charm that was seemingly irreconcilable with such personal defects.

She was very like her grandfather, the Duke of Casa-Real, a grandee of Spain. At this moment, when we first see her, the charm which in earlier days despotically grasped the soul of poets and lovers of poesy now emanated from that head with greater vigor than at any former period of her life, spending itself, as it were, upon the void, and expressing a nature of all-powerful fascination over men, though it was at the same time powerless over destiny.

When her eyes turned from the glass globes, where they were gazing at the fish they saw not, she raised them with a despairing action, as if to invoke the skies. Her sufferings seemed of a kind that are told to God alone. The silence was unbroken save for the chirp of crickets and the shrill

whirr of a few locusts, coming from the little garden then hotter than an oven, and the dull sound of silver and plates, and the moving of chairs in the adjoining room, where a servant was preparing to serve the dinner.

At this moment, the distressed woman roused herself from her abstraction and listened attentively; she took her handkerchief, wiped away her tears, attempted to smile, and so resolutely effaced the expression of pain that was stamped on every feature that she presently seemed in the state of happy indifference which comes with a life exempt from care. Whether it were that the habit of living in this house to which infirmities confined her enabled her to perceive certain natural effects that are imperceptible to the senses of others, but which persons under the influence of excessive feeling are keen to discover, or whether Nature, in compensation for her physical defects, had given her more delicate sensations than better organized beings, – it is certain that this woman had heard the steps of a man in a gallery built above the kitchens and the servants' hall, by which the front house communicated with the "back-quarter." The steps grew more distinct. Soon, without possessing the power of this ardent creature to abolish space and meet her other self, even a stranger would have heard the foot-fall of a man upon the staircase which led down from the gallery to the parlor.

The sound of that step would have startled the most heedless being into thought; it was impossible to hear it coolly. A precipitate, headlong step produces fear. When a man springs forward and cries, "Fire!" his feet speak as loudly as his voice. If this be so, then a contrary gait ought not to cause less powerful emotion. The slow approach, the dragging step of the coming man might have irritated an unreflecting spectator; but an observer, or a nervous person, would undoubtedly have felt something akin to terror at the measured tread of feet that seemed devoid of life, and under which the stairs creaked loudly, as though two iron weights were striking them alternately. The mind recognized at once either the heavy, undecided step of an old man or the majestic tread of a great thinker bearing the worlds with him.

When the man had reached the lowest stair, and had planted both feet upon the tiled floor with a hesitating, uncertain movement, he stood still for a moment on the wide landing which led on one side to the servants' hall, and on the other to the parlor through a door concealed in the panelling of that room, – as was another door, leading from the parlor to the dining-room. At this moment a slight shudder, like the sensation caused by an electric spark, shook the woman seated in the armchair; then a soft smile brightened her lips, and her face, moved by the expectation of a pleasure, shone like that of an Italian Madonna. She suddenly gained strength to drive her terrors back into the depths of her heart. Then she turned her face to the panel of the wall which she knew was about to open, and which in fact was now pushed in with such brusque violence that the poor woman herself seemed jarred by the shock.

Balthazar Claes suddenly appeared, made a few steps forward, did not look at the woman, or if he looked at her did not see her, and stood erect in the middle of the parlor, leaning his half-bowed head on his right hand. A sharp pang to which the woman could not accustom herself, although it was daily renewed, wrung her heart, dispelled her smile, contracted the sallow forehead between the eyebrows, indenting that line which the frequent expression of excessive feeling scores so deeply; her eyes filled with tears, but she wiped them quickly as she looked at Balthazar.

It was impossible not to be deeply impressed by this head of the family of Claes. When young, he must have resembled the noble family martyr who had threatened to be another Artevelde to Charles V.; but as he stood there at this moment, he seemed over sixty years of age, though he was only fifty; and this premature old age had destroyed the honorable likeness. His tall figure was slightly bent, – either because his labors, whatever they were, obliged him to stoop, or that the spinal column was curved by the weight of his head. He had a broad chest and square shoulders, but the lower parts of his body were lank and wasted, though nervous; and this discrepancy in a physical organization evidently once perfect puzzled the mind which endeavored to explain this anomalous figure by some possible singularities of the man's life.

His thick blond hair, ill cared-for, fell over his shoulders in the Dutch fashion, and its very disorder was in keeping with the general eccentricity of his person. His broad brow showed certain protuberances which Gall identifies with poetic genius. His clear and full blue eyes had the brusque vivacity which may be noticed in searchers for occult causes. The nose, probably perfect in early life, was now elongated, and the nostrils seemed to have gradually opened wider from an involuntary tension of the olfactory muscles. The cheek-bones were very prominent, which made the cheeks themselves, already withered, seem more sunken; his mouth, full of sweetness, was squeezed in between the nose and a short chin, which projected sharply. The shape of the face, however, was long rather than oval, and the scientific doctrine which sees in every human face a likeness to an animal would have found its confirmation in that of Balthazar Claes, which bore a strong resemblance to a horse's head. The skin clung closely to the bones, as though some inward fire were incessantly drying its juices. Sometimes, when he gazed into space, as if to see the realization of his hopes, it almost seemed as though the flames that devoured his soul were issuing from his nostrils.

The inspired feelings that animate great men shone forth on the pale face furrowed with wrinkles, on the brow haggard with care like that of an old monarch, but above all they gleamed in the sparkling eye, whose fires were fed by chastity imposed by the tyranny of ideas and by the inward consecration of a great intellect. The cavernous eyes seemed to have sunk in their orbits through midnight vigils and the terrible reaction of hopes destroyed, yet ceaselessly reborn. The zealous fanaticism inspired by an art or a science was evident in this man; it betrayed itself in the strange, persistent abstraction of his mind expressed by his dress and bearing, which were in keeping with the anomalous peculiarities of his person.

His large, hairy hands were dirty, and the nails, which were very long, had deep black lines at their extremities. His shoes were not cleaned and the shoe-strings were missing. Of all that Flemish household, the master alone took the strange liberty of being slovenly. His black cloth trousers were covered with stains, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, his cravat awry, his greenish coat ripped at the seams, – completing an array of signs, great and small, which in any other man would have betokened a poverty begotten of vice, but which in Balthazar Claes was the negligence of genius.

Vice and Genius too often produce the same effects; and this misleads the common mind. What is genius but a long excess which squanders time and wealth and physical powers, and leads more rapidly to a hospital than the worst of passions? Men even seem to have more respect for vices than for genius, since to the latter they refuse credit. The profits accruing from the hidden labors of the brain are so remote that the social world fears to square accounts with the man of learning in his lifetime, preferring to get rid of its obligations by not forgiving his misfortunes or his poverty.

If, in spite of this inveterate forgetfulness of the present, Balthazar Claes had abandoned his mysterious abstractions, if some sweet and companionable meaning had revisited that thoughtful countenance, if the fixed eyes had lost their rigid strain and shone with feeling, if he had ever looked humanly about him and returned to the real life of common things, it would indeed have been difficult not to do involuntary homage to the winning beauty of his face and the gracious soul that would then have shone from it. As it was, all who looked at him regretted that the man belonged no more to the world at large, and said to one another: "He must have been very handsome in his youth." A vulgar error! Never was Balthazar Claes's appearance more poetic than at this moment. Lavater, had he seen him, would fain have studied that head so full of patience, of Flemish loyalty, and pure morality, – where all was broad and noble, and passion seemed calm because it was strong.

The conduct of this man could not be otherwise than pure; his word was sacred, his friendships seemed undeviating, his self-devotedness complete: and yet the will to employ those qualities in patriotic service, for the world or for the family, was directed, fatally, elsewhere. This citizen, bound to guard the welfare of a household, to manage property, to guide his children towards a noble future, was living outside the line of his duty and his affections, in communion with an attendant spirit. A

priest might have thought him inspired by the word of God; an artist would have hailed him as a great master; an enthusiast would have taken him for a seer of the Swedenborgian faith.

At the present moment, the dilapidated, uncouth, and ruined clothes that he wore contrasted strangely with the graceful elegance of the woman who was sadly admiring him. Deformed persons who have intellect, or nobility of soul, show an exquisite taste in their apparel. Either they dress simply, convinced that their charm is wholly moral, or they make others forget their imperfections by an elegance of detail which diverts the eye and occupies the mind. Not only did this woman possess a noble soul, but she loved Balthazar Claes with that instinct of the woman which gives a foretaste of the communion of angels. Brought up in one of the most illustrious families of Belgium, she would have learned good taste had she not possessed it; and now, taught by the desire of constantly pleasing the man she loved, she knew how to clothe herself admirably, and without producing incongruity between her elegance and the defects of her conformation. The bust, however, was defective in the shoulders only, one of which was noticeably much larger than the other.

She looked out of the window into the court-yard, then towards the garden, as if to make sure she was alone with Balthazar, and presently said, in a gentle voice and with a look full of a Flemish woman's submissiveness, – for between these two love had long since driven out the pride of her Spanish nature: —

"Balthazar, are you so very busy? this is the thirty-third Sunday since you have been to mass or vespers."

Claes did not answer; his wife bowed her head, clasped her hands, and waited: she knew that his silence meant neither contempt nor indifference, only a tyrannous preoccupation. Balthazar was one of those beings who preserve deep in their souls and after long years all their youthful delicacy of feeling; he would have thought it criminal to wound by so much as a word a woman weighed down by the sense of physical disfigurement. No man knew better than he that a look, a word, suffices to blot out years of happiness, and is the more cruel because it contrasts with the unfailing tenderness of the past: our nature leads us to suffer more from one discord in our happiness than pleasure coming in the midst of trouble can bring us joy.

Presently Balthazar appeared to waken; he looked quickly about him, and said, —

"Vespers? Ah, yes! the children are at vespers."

He made a few steps forward, and looked into the garden, where magnificent tulips were growing on all sides; then he suddenly stopped short as if brought up against a wall, and cried out, —

"Why should they not combine within a given time?"

"Is he going mad?" thought the wife, much terrified.

To give greater interest to the present scene, which was called forth by the situation of their affairs, it is absolutely necessary to glance back at the past lives of Balthazar Claes and the granddaughter of the Duke of Casa-Real.

Towards the year 1783, Monsieur Balthazar Claes-Molina de Nourho, then twenty-two years of age, was what is called in France a fine man. He came to finish his education in Paris, where he acquired excellent manners in the society of Madame d'Egmont, Count Horn, the Prince of Aremberg, the Spanish ambassador, Helvetius, and other Frenchmen originally from Belgium, or coming lately thence, whose birth or wealth won them admittance among the great seigneurs who at that time gave the tone to social life. Young Claes found several relations and friends ready to launch him into the great world at the very moment when that world was about to fall. Like other young men, he was at first more attracted by glory and science than by the vanities of life. He frequented the society of scientific men, particularly Lavoisier, who at that time was better known to the world for his enormous fortune as a "fermier-general" than for his discoveries in chemistry, – though later the great chemist was to eclipse the man of wealth.

Balthazar grew enamored of the science which Lavoisier cultivated, and became his devoted disciple; but he was young, and handsome as Helvetius, and before long the Parisian women taught

him to distil wit and love exclusively. Though he had studied chemistry with such ardor that Lavoisier commended him, he deserted science and his master for those mistresses of fashion and good taste from whom young men take finishing lessons in knowledge of life, and learn the usages of good society, which in Europe forms, as it were, one family.

The intoxicating dream of social success lasted but a short time. Balthazar left Paris, weary of a hollow existence which suited neither his ardent soul nor his loving heart. Domestic life, so calm, so tender, which the very name of Flanders recalled to him, seemed far more fitted to his character and to the aspirations of his heart. No gilded Parisian salon had effaced from his mind the harmonies of the panelled parlor and the little garden where his happy childhood had slipped away. A man must needs be without a home to remain in Paris, – Paris, the city of cosmopolitans, of men who wed the world, and clasp her with the arms of Science, Art, or Power.

The son of Flanders came back to Douai, like La Fontaine's pigeon to its nest; he wept with joy as he re-entered the town on the day of the Gayant procession, – Gayant, the superstitious luck of Douai, the glory of Flemish traditions, introduced there at the time the Claes family had emigrated from Ghent. The death of Balthazar's father and mother had left the old mansion deserted, and the young man was occupied for a time in settling its affairs. His first grief over, he wished to marry; he needed the domestic happiness whose every religious aspect had fastened upon his mind. He even followed the family custom of seeking a wife in Ghent, or at Bruges, or Antwerp; but it happened that no woman whom he met there suited him. Undoubtedly, he had certain peculiar ideas as to marriage; from his youth he had been accused of never following the beaten track.

One day, at the house of a relation in Ghent, he heard a young lady, then living in Brussels, spoken of in a manner which gave rise to a long discussion. Some said that the beauty of Mademoiselle de Temninck was destroyed by the imperfections of her figure; others declared that she was perfect in spite of her defects. Balthazar's old cousin, at whose house the discussion took place, assured his guests that, handsome or not, she had a soul that would make him marry her were he a marrying man; and he told how she had lately renounced her share of her parents' property to enable her brother to make a marriage worthy of his name; thus preferring his happiness to her own, and sacrificing her future to his interests, – for it was not to be supposed that Mademoiselle de Temninck would marry late in life and without property when, young and wealthy, she had met with no aspirant.

A few days later, Balthazar Claes made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Temninck; with whom he fell deeply in love. At first, Josephine de Temninck thought herself the object of a mere caprice, and refused to listen to Monsieur Claes; but passion is contagious; and to a poor girl who was lame and ill-made, the sense of inspiring love in a young and handsome man carries with it such strong seduction that she finally consented to allow him to woo her.

It would need a volume to paint the love of a young girl humbly submissive to the verdict of a world that calls her plain, while she feels within herself the irresistible charm which comes of sensibility and true feeling. It involves fierce jealousy of happiness, freaks of cruel vengeance against some fancied rival who wins a glance, – emotions, terrors, unknown to the majority of women, and which ought, therefore, to be more than indicated. The doubt, the dramatic doubt of love, is the keynote of this analysis, where certain souls will find once more the lost, but unforgotten, poetry of their early struggles; the passionate exaltations of the heart which the face must not betray; the fear that we may not be understood, and the boundless joy of being so; the hesitations of the soul which recoils upon itself, and the magnetic propulsions which give to the eyes an infinitude of shades; the promptings to suicide caused by a word, dispelled by an intonation; trembling glances which veil an inward daring; sudden desires to speak and act that are paralyzed by their own violence; the secret eloquence of common phrases spoken in a quivering voice; the mysterious workings of that pristine modesty of soul and that divine discernment which lead to hidden generosities, and give so exquisite a flavor to silent devotion; in short, all the loveliness of young love, and the weaknesses of its power.

Mademoiselle Josephine de Temninck was coquettish from nobility of soul. The sense of her obvious imperfections made her as difficult to win as the handsomest of women. The fear of some day displeasing the eye roused her pride, destroyed her trustfulness, and gave her the courage to hide in the depths of her heart that dawning happiness which other women delight in making known by their manners, – wearing it proudly, like a coronet. The more love urged her towards Balthazar, the less she dared to express her feelings. The glance, the gesture, the question and answer as it were of a pretty woman, so flattering to the man she loves, would they not be in her case mere humiliating speculation? A beautiful woman can be her natural self, – the world overlooks her little follies or her clumsiness; whereas a single criticising glance checks the noblest expression on the lips of an ugly woman, adds to the ill-grace of her gesture, gives timidity to her eyes and awkwardness to her whole bearing. She knows too well that to her alone the world condones no faults; she is denied the right to repair them; indeed, the chance to do so is never given. This necessity of being perfect and on her guard at every moment, must surely chill her faculties and numb their exercise? Such a woman can exist only in an atmosphere of angelic forbearance. Where are the hearts from which forbearance comes with no alloy of bitter and stinging pity.

These thoughts, to which the codes of social life had accustomed her, and the sort of consideration more wounding than insult shown to her by the world, – a consideration which increases a misfortune by making it apparent, – oppressed Mademoiselle de Temninck with a constant sense of embarrassment, which drove back into her soul its happiest expression, and chilled and stiffened her attitudes, her speech, her looks. Loving and beloved, she dared to be eloquent or beautiful only when alone. Unhappy and oppressed in the broad daylight of life, she might have been enchanting could she have expanded in the shadow. Often, to test the love thus offered to her, and at the risk of losing it, she refused to wear the draperies that concealed some portion of her defects, and her Spanish eyes grew entrancing when they saw that Balthazar thought her beautiful as before.

Nevertheless, even so, distrust soiled the rare moments when she yielded herself to happiness. She asked herself if Claes were not seeking a domestic slave, – one who would necessarily keep the house? whether he had himself no secret imperfection which obliged him to be satisfied with a poor, deformed girl? Such perpetual misgivings gave a priceless value to the few short hours during which she trusted the sincerity and the permanence of a love which was to avenge her on the world. Sometimes she provoked hazardous discussions, and probed the inner consciousness of her lover by exaggerating her defects. At such times she often wrung from Balthazar truths that were far from flattering; but she loved the embarrassment into which he fell when she had led him to say that what he loved in a woman was a noble soul and the devotion which made each day of life a constant happiness; and that after a few years of married life the handsomest of women was no more to a husband than the ugliest. After gathering up what there was of truth in all such paradoxes tending to reduce the value of beauty, Balthazar would suddenly perceive the ungraciousness of his remarks, and show the goodness of his heart by the delicate transitions of thought with which he proved to Mademoiselle de Temninck that she was perfect in his eyes.

The spirit of devotion which, it may be, is the crown of love in a woman, was not lacking in this young girl, who had always despaired of being loved; at first, the prospect of a struggle in which feeling and sentiment would triumph over actual beauty tempted her; then, she fancied a grandeur in giving herself to a man in whose love she did not believe; finally, she was forced to admit that happiness, however short its duration might be, was too precious to resign.

Such hesitations, such struggles, giving the charm and the unexpectedness of passion to this noble creature, inspired Balthazar with a love that was well-nigh chivalric.

CHAPTER III

The marriage took place at the beginning of the year 1795. Husband and wife came to Douai that the first days of their union might be spent in the patriarchal house of the Claes, – the treasures of which were increased by those of Mademoiselle de Temninck, who brought with her several fine pictures of Murillo and Velasquez, the diamonds of her mother, and the magnificent wedding-gifts, made to her by her brother, the Duke of Casa-Real.

Few women were ever happier than Madame Claes. Her happiness lasted for fifteen years without a cloud, diffusing itself like a vivid light into every nook and detail of her life. Most men have inequalities of character which produce discord, and deprive their households of the harmony which is the ideal of a home; the majority are blemished with some littleness or meanness, and meanness of any kind begets bickering. One man is honorable and diligent, but hard and crabbed; another kindly, but obstinate; this one loves his wife, yet his will is arbitrary and uncertain; that other, preoccupied by ambition, pays off his affections as he would a debt, bestows the luxuries of wealth but deprives the daily life of happiness, – in short, the average man of social life is essentially incomplete, without being signally to blame. Men of talent are as variable as barometers; genius alone is intrinsically good.

For this reason unalloyed happiness is found at the two extremes of the moral scale. The good-natured fool and the man of genius alone are capable – the one through weakness, the other by strength – of that equanimity of temper, that unvarying gentleness, which soften the asperities of daily life. In the one, it is indifference or stolidity; in the other, indulgence and a portion of the divine thought of which he is the interpreter, and which needs to be consistent alike in principle and application. Both natures are equally simple; but in one there is vacancy, in the other depth. This is why clever women are disposed to take dull men as the small change for great ones.

Balthazar Claes carried his greatness into the lesser things of life. He delighted in considering conjugal love as a magnificent work; and like all men of lofty aims who can bear nothing imperfect, he wished to develop all its beauties. His powers of mind enlivened the calm of happiness, his noble nature marked his attentions with the charm of grace. Though he shared the philosophical tenets of the eighteenth century, he installed a chaplain in his home until 1801 (in spite of the risk he ran from the revolutionary decrees), so that he might not thwart the Spanish fanaticism which his wife had sucked in with her mother's milk: later, when public worship was restored in France, he accompanied her to mass every Sunday. His passion never ceased to be that of a lover. The protecting power, which women like so much, was never exercised by this husband, lest to that wife it might seem pity. He treated her with exquisite flattery as an equal, and sometimes mutinied against her, as men will, as though to brave the supremacy of a pretty woman. His lips wore a smile of happiness, his speech was ever tender; he loved his Josephine for herself and for himself, with an ardor that crowned with perpetual praise the qualities and the loveliness of a wife.

Fidelity, often the result of social principle, religious duty, or self-interest on the part of a husband, was in this case involuntary, and not without the sweet flatteries of the spring-time of love. Duty was the only marriage obligation unknown to these lovers, whose love was equal; for Balthazar Claes found the complete and lasting realization of his hopes in Mademoiselle de Temninck; his heart was satisfied but not wearied, the man within him was ever happy.

Not only did the daughter of Casa-Real derive from her Spanish blood the intuition of that science which varies pleasure and makes it infinite, but she possessed the spirit of unbounded self-devotion, which is the genius of her sex as grace is that of beauty. Her love was a blind fanaticism which, at a nod, would have sent her joyously to her death. Balthazar's own delicacy had exalted the generous emotions of his wife, and inspired her with an imperious need of giving more than she received. This mutual exchange of happiness which each lavished upon the other, put the mainspring of her life visibly outside of her personality, and filled her words, her looks, her actions, with an ever-

growing love. Gratitude fertilized and varied the life of each heart; and the certainty of being all in all to one another excluded the paltry things of existence, while it magnified the smallest accessories.

The deformed woman whom her husband thinks straight, the lame woman whom he would not have otherwise, the old woman who seems ever young – are they not the happiest creatures of the feminine world? Can human passion go beyond it? The glory of a woman is to be adored for a defect. To forget that a lame woman does not walk straight may be the glamour of a moment, but to love her because she is lame is the deification of her defects. In the gospel of womanhood it is written: "Blessed are the imperfect, for theirs is the kingdom of Love." If this be so, surely beauty is a misfortune; that fugitive flower counts for too much in the feeling that a woman inspires; often she is loved for her beauty as another is married for her money. But the love inspired or bestowed by a woman disinherited of the frail advantages pursued by the sons of Adam, is true love, the mysterious passion, the ardent embrace of souls, a sentiment for which the day of disenchantment never comes. That woman has charms unknown to the world, from whose jurisdiction she withdraws herself: she is beautiful with a meaning; her glory lies in making her imperfections forgotten, and thus she constantly succeeds in doing so.

The celebrated attachments of history were nearly all inspired by women in whom the vulgar mind would have found defects, – Cleopatra, Jeanne de Naples, Diane de Poitiers, Mademoiselle de la Valliere, Madame de Pompadour; in fact, the majority of the women whom love has rendered famous were not without infirmities and imperfections, while the greater number of those whose beauty is cited as perfect came to some tragic end of love.

This apparent singularity must have a cause. It may be that man lives more by sentiment than by sense; perhaps the physical charm of beauty is limited, while the moral charm of a woman without beauty is infinite. Is not this the moral of the fable on which the Arabian Nights are based? An ugly wife of Henry VIII. might have defied the axe, and subdued to herself the inconstancy of her master.

By a strange chance, not inexplicable, however, in a girl of Spanish origin, Madame Claes was uneducated. She knew how to read and write, but up to the age of twenty, at which time her parents withdrew her from a convent, she had read none but ascetic books. On her first entrance into the world, she was eager for pleasure and learned only the flimsy art of dress; she was, moreover, so deeply conscious of her ignorance that she dared not join in conversation; for which reason she was supposed to have little mind. Yet, the mystical education of a convent had one good result; it left her feelings in full force and her natural powers of mind uninjured. Stupid and plain as an heiress in the eyes of the world, she became intellectual and beautiful to her husband. During the first years of their married life, Balthazar endeavored to give her at least the knowledge that she needed to appear to advantage in good society: but he was doubtless too late, she had no memory but that of the heart. Josephine never forgot anything that Claes told her relating to themselves; she remembered the most trifling circumstances of their happy life; but of her evening studies nothing remained to her on the morrow.

This ignorance might have caused much discord between husband and wife, but Madame Claes's understanding of the passion of love was so simple and ingenuous, she loved her husband so religiously, so sacredly, and the thought of preserving her happiness made her so adroit, that she managed always to seem to understand him, and it was seldom indeed that her ignorance was evident. Moreover, when two persons love one another so well that each day seems for them the beginning of their passion, phenomena arise out of this teeming happiness which change all the conditions of life. It resembles childhood, careless of all that is not laughter, joy, and merriment. Then, when life is in full activity, when its hearths glow, man lets the fire burn without thought or discussion, without considering either the means or the end.

No daughter of Eve ever more truly understood the calling of a wife than Madame Claes. She had all the submission of a Flemish woman, but her Spanish pride gave it a higher flavor. Her bearing was imposing; she knew how to command respect by a look which expressed her sense of birth and

dignity: but she trembled before Claes; she held him so high, so near to God, carrying to him every act of her life, every thought of her heart, that her love was not without a certain respectful fear which made it keener. She proudly assumed all the habits of a Flemish bourgeoisie, and put her self-love into making the home life liberally happy, – preserving every detail of the house in scrupulous cleanliness, possessing nothing that did not serve the purposes of true comfort, supplying her table with the choicest food, and putting everything within those walls into harmony with the life of her heart.

The pair had two sons and two daughters. The eldest, Marguerite, was born in 1796. The last child was a boy, now three years old, named Jean-Balthazar. The maternal sentiment in Madame Claes was almost equal to her love for her husband; and there rose in her soul, especially during the last days of her life, a terrible struggle between those nearly balanced feelings, of which the one became, as it were, an enemy of the other. The tears and the terror that marked her face at the moment when this tale of a domestic drama then lowering over the quiet house begins, were caused by the fear of having sacrificed her children to her husband.

In 1805, Madame Claes's brother died without children. The Spanish law does not allow a sister to succeed to territorial possessions, which follow the title; but the duke had left her in his will about sixty thousand ducats, and this sum the heirs of the collateral branch did not seek to retain. Though the feeling which united her to Balthazar Claes was such that no thought of personal interest could ever sully it, Josephine felt a certain pleasure in possessing a fortune equal to that of her husband, and was happy in giving something to one who had so nobly given everything to her. Thus, a mere chance turned a marriage which worldly minds had declared foolish, into an excellent alliance, seen from the standpoint of material interests. The use to which this sum of money should be put became, however, somewhat difficult to determine.

The House of Claes was so richly supplied with furniture, pictures, and objects of art of priceless value, that it was difficult to add anything worthy of what was already there. The tastes of the family through long periods of time had accumulated these treasures. One generation followed the quest of noble pictures, leaving behind it the necessity of completing a collection still unfinished; and thus the taste became hereditary in the family. The hundred pictures which adorned the gallery leading from the family building to the reception-rooms on the first floor of the front house, as well as some fifty others placed about the salons, were the product of the patient researches of three centuries. Among them were choice specimens of Rubens, Ruysdael, Vandyke, Terburg, Gerard Dow, Teniers, Mieris, Paul Potter, Wouvermans, Rembrandt, Hobbema, Cranach, and Holbein. French and Italian pictures were in a minority, but all were authentic and masterly.

Another generation had fancied Chinese and Japanese porcelains: this Claes was eager after rare furniture, that one for silver-ware; in fact, each and all had their mania, their passion, – a trait which belongs in a striking degree to the Flemish character. The father of Balthazar, a last relic of the once famous Dutch society, left behind him the finest known collection of tulips.

Besides these hereditary riches, which represented an enormous capital, and were the choice ornament of the venerable house, – a house that was simple as a shell outside but, like a shell, adorned within by pearls of price and glowing with rich color, – Balthazar Claes possessed a country-house on the plain of Orchies, not far from Douai. Instead of basing his expenses, as Frenchmen do, upon his revenues, he followed the old Dutch custom of spending only a fourth of his income. Twelve hundred ducats a year put his costs of living at a level with those of the richest men of the place. The promulgation of the Civil Code proved the wisdom of this course. Compelling, as it did, the equal division of property, the Title of Succession would some day leave each child with limited means, and disperse the treasures of the Claes collection. Balthazar, therefore, in concert with Madame Claes, invested his wife's property so as to secure to each child a fortune eventually equal to his own. The house of Claes still maintained its moderate scale of living, and bought woodlands somewhat the

worse for wars that had laid waste the country, but which in ten years' time, if well-preserved, would return an enormous value.

The upper ranks of society in Douai, which Monsieur Claes frequented, appreciated so justly the noble character and qualities of his wife that, by tacit consent she was released from those social duties to which the provinces cling so tenaciously. During the winter season, when she lived in town, she seldom went into society; society came to her. She received every Wednesday, and gave three grand dinners every month. Her friends felt that she was more at ease in her own house; where, indeed, her passion for her husband and the care she bestowed on the education of her children tended to keep her.

Such had been, up to the year 1809, the general course of this household, which had nothing in common with the ordinary run of conventional ideas, though the outward life of these two persons, secretly full of love and joy, was like that of other people. Balthazar Claes's passion for his wife, which she had known how to perpetuate, seemed, to use his own expression, to spend its inborn vigor and fidelity on the cultivation of happiness, which was far better than the cultivation of tulips (though to that he had always had a leaning), and dispensed him from the duty of following a mania like his ancestors.

At the close of this year, the mind and the manners of Balthazar Claes underwent a fatal change, – a change which began so gradually that at first Madame Claes did not think it necessary to inquire the cause. One night her husband went to bed with a mind so preoccupied that she felt it incumbent on her to respect his mood. Her womanly delicacy and her submissive habits always led her to wait for Balthazar's confidence; which, indeed, was assured to her by so constant an affection that she had never had the slightest opening for jealousy. Though certain of obtaining an answer whenever she should make the inquiry, she still retained enough of the earlier impressions of her life to dread a refusal. Besides, the moral malady of her husband had its phases, and only came by slow degrees to the intolerable point at which it destroyed the happiness of the family.

However occupied Balthazar Claes might be, he continued for several months cheerful, affectionate, and ready to talk; the change in his character showed itself only by frequent periods of absent-mindedness. Madame Claes long hoped to hear from her husband himself the nature of the secret employment in which he was engaged; perhaps, she thought, he would reveal it when it developed some useful result; many men are led by pride to conceal the nature of their efforts, and only make them known at the moment of success. When the day of triumph came, surely domestic happiness would return, more vivid than ever when Balthazar became aware of this chasm in the life of love, which his heart would surely disavow. Josephine knew her husband well enough to be certain that he would never forgive himself for having made his Pepita less than happy during several months.

She kept silence therefore, and felt a sort of joy in thus suffering by him for him: her passion had a tinge of that Spanish piety which allows no separation between religion and love, and believes in no sentiment without suffering. She waited for the return of her husband's affection, saying daily to herself, "To-morrow it may come," – treating her happiness as though it were an absent friend.

During this stage of her secret distress, she conceived her last child. Horrible crisis, which revealed a future of anguish! In the midst of her husband's abstractions love showed itself on this occasion an abstraction even greater than the rest. Her woman's pride, hurt for the first time, made her sound the depths of the unknown abyss which separated her from the Claes of earlier days. From that time Balthazar's condition grew rapidly worse. The man formerly so wrapped up in his domestic happiness, who played for hours with his children on the parlor carpet or round the garden paths, who seemed able to exist only in the light of his Pepita's dark eyes, did not even perceive her pregnancy, seldom shared the family life, and even forgot his own.

The longer Madame Claes postponed inquiring into the cause of his preoccupation the less she dared to do so. At the very idea, her blood ran cold and her voice grew faint. At last the thought occurred to her that she had ceased to please her husband, and then indeed she was seriously alarmed.

That fear now filled her mind, drove her to despair, then to feverish excitement, and became the text of many an hour of melancholy reverie. She defended Balthazar at her own expense, calling herself old and ugly; then she imagined a generous though humiliating consideration for her in this secret occupation by which he secured to her a negative fidelity; and she resolved to give him back his independence by allowing one of those unspoken divorces which make the happiness of many a marriage.

Before bidding farewell to conjugal life, Madame Claes made some attempt to read her husband's heart, and found it closed. Little by little, she saw him become indifferent to all that he had formerly loved; he neglected his tulips, he cared no longer for his children. There could be no doubt that he was given over to some passion that was not of the heart, but which, to a woman's mind, is not less withering. His love was dormant, not lost: this might be a consolation, but the misfortune remained the same.

The continuance of such a state of things is explained by one word, – hope, the secret of all conjugal situations. It so happened that whenever the poor woman reached a depth of despair which gave her courage to question her husband, she met with a few brief moments of happiness when she was able to feel that if Balthazar was indeed in the clutch of some devilish power, he was permitted, sometimes at least, to return to himself. At such moments, when her heaven brightened, she was too eager to enjoy its happiness to trouble him with importunate questions: later, when she endeavored to speak to him, he would suddenly escape, leave her abruptly, or drop into the gulf of meditation from which no word of hers could drag him.

Before long the reaction of the moral upon the physical condition began its ravages, – at first imperceptibly, except to the eyes of a loving woman following the secret thought of a husband through all its manifestations. Often she could scarcely restrain her tears when she saw him, after dinner, sink into an armchair by the corner of the fireplace, and remain there, gloomy and abstracted. She noted with terror the slow changes which deteriorated that face, once, to her eyes, sublime through love: the life of the soul was retreating from it; the structure remained, but the spirit was gone. Sometimes the eyes were glassy, and seemed as if they had turned their gaze and were looking inward. When the children had gone to bed, and the silence and solitude oppressed her, Pepita would say, "My friend, are you ill?" and Balthazar would make no answer; or if he answered, he would come to himself with a quiver, like a man snatched suddenly from sleep, and utter a "No" so harsh and grating that it fell like a stone on the palpitating heart of his wife.

Though she tried to hide this strange state of things from her friends, Madame Claes was obliged sometimes to allude to it. The social world of Douai, in accordance with the custom of provincial towns, had made Balthazar's aberrations a topic of conversation, and many persons were aware of certain details that were still unknown to Madame Claes. Disregarding the reticence which politeness demanded, a few friends expressed to her so much anxiety on the subject that she found herself compelled to defend her husband's peculiarities.

"Monsieur Claes," she said, "has undertaken a work which wholly absorbs him; its success will eventually redound not only to the honor of the family but to that of his country."

This mysterious explanation was too flattering to the ambition of a town whose local patriotism and desire for glory exceed those of other places, not to be readily accepted, and it produced on all minds a reaction in favor of Balthazar.

The supposition of his wife was, to a certain extent, well-founded. Several artificers of various trades had long been at work in the garret of the front house, where Balthazar went early every morning. After remaining, at first, for several hours, an absence to which his wife and household grew gradually accustomed, he ended by being there all day. But – unexpected shock! – Madame Claes learned through the humiliating medium of some women friends, who showed surprise at her ignorance, that her husband constantly imported instruments of physical science, valuable materials, books, machinery, etc., from Paris, and was on the highroad to ruin in search of the Philosopher's

Stone. She ought, so her kind friends added, to think of her children, and her own future; it was criminal not to use her influence to draw Monsieur Claes from the fatal path on which he had entered.

Though Madame Claes, with the tone and manner of a great lady, silenced these absurd speeches, she was inwardly terrified in spite of her apparent confidence, and she resolved to break through her present system of silence and resignation. She brought about one of those little scenes in which husband and wife are on an equal footing; less timid at such a moment, she dared to ask Balthazar the reason for his change, the motive of his constant seclusion. The Flemish husband frowned, and replied: —

"My dear, you could not understand it."

Soon after, however, Josephine insisted on being told the secret, gently complaining that she was not allowed to share all the thoughts of one whose life she shared.

"Very well, since it interests you so much," said Balthazar, taking his wife upon his knee and caressing her black hair, "I will tell you that I have returned to the study of chemistry, and I am the happiest man on earth."

CHAPTER IV

Two years after the winter when Monsieur Claes returned to chemistry, the aspect of his house was changed. Whether it were that society was affronted by his perpetual absent-mindedness and chose to think itself in the way, or that Madame Claes's secret anxieties made her less agreeable than before, certain it is that she no longer saw any but her intimate friends. Balthazar went nowhere, shut himself up in his laboratory all day, sometimes stayed there all night, and only appeared in the bosom of his family at dinner-time.

After the second year he no longer passed the summer at his country-house, and his wife was unwilling to live there alone. Sometimes he went to walk and did not return till the following day, leaving Madame Claes a prey to mortal anxiety during the night. After causing a fruitless search for him through the town, whose gates, like those of other fortified places, were closed at night, it was impossible to send into the country, and the unhappy woman could only wait and suffer till morning. Balthazar, who had forgotten the hour at which the gates closed, would come tranquilly home next day, quite unmindful of the tortures his absence had inflicted on his family; and the happiness of getting him back proved as dangerous an excitement of feeling to his wife as her fears of the preceding night. She kept silence and dared not question him, for when she did so on the occasion of his first absence, he answered with an air of surprise: —

"Well, what of it? Can I not take a walk?"

Passions never deceive. Madame Claes's anxieties corroborated the rumors she had taken so much pains to deny. The experience of her youth had taught her to understand the polite pity of the world. Resolved not to undergo it a second time, she withdrew more and more into the privacy of her own house, now deserted by society and even by her nearest friends.

Among these many causes of distress, the negligence and disorder of Balthazar's dress, so degrading to a man of his station, was not the least bitter to a woman accustomed to the exquisite nicety of Flemish life. At first Josephine endeavored, in concert with Balthazar's valet, Lemulquinier, to repair the daily devastation of his clothing, but even that she was soon forced to give up. The very day when Balthazar, unaware of the substitution, put on new clothes in place of those that were stained, torn, or full of holes, he made rags of them.

The poor wife, whose perfect happiness had lasted fifteen years, during which time her jealousy had never once been roused, was apparently and suddenly nothing in the heart where she had lately reigned. Spanish by race, the feelings of a Spanish woman rose within her when she discovered her rival in a Science that allured her husband from her: torments of jealousy preyed upon her heart and renewed her love. What could she do against Science? Should she combat that tyrannous, unyielding, growing power? Could she kill an invisible rival? Could a woman, limited by nature, contend with an Idea whose delights are infinite, whose attractions are ever new? How make head against the fascination of ideas that spring the fresher and the lovelier out of difficulty, and entice a man so far from this world that he forgets even his dearest loves?

At last one day, in spite of Balthazar's strict orders, Madame Claes resolved to follow him, to shut herself up in the garret where his life was spent, and struggle hand to hand against her rival by sharing her husband's labors during the long hours he gave to that terrible mistress. She determined to slip secretly into the mysterious laboratory of seduction, and obtain the right to be there always. Lemulquinier alone had that right, and she meant to share it with him; but to prevent his witnessing the contention with her husband which she feared at the outset, she waited for an opportunity when the valet should be out of the way. For a while she studied the goings and comings of the man with angry impatience; did he not know that which was denied to her – all that her husband hid from her, all that she dared not inquire into? Even a servant was preferred to a wife!

The day came; she approached the place, trembling, yet almost happy. For the first time in her life she encountered Balthazar's anger. She had hardly opened the door before he sprang upon her, seized her, threw her roughly on the staircase, so that she narrowly escaped rolling to the bottom.

"God be praised! you are still alive!" he cried, raising her.

A glass vessel had broken into fragments over Madame Claes, who saw her husband standing by her, pale, terrified, and almost livid.

"My dear, I forbade you to come here," he said, sitting down on the stairs, as though prostrated. "The saints have saved your life! By what chance was it that my eyes were on the door when you opened it? We have just escaped death."

"Then I might have been happy!" she exclaimed.

"My experiment has failed," continued Balthazar. "You alone could I forgive for that terrible disappointment. I was about to decompose nitrogen. Go back to your own affairs."

Balthazar re-entered the laboratory and closed the door.

"Decompose nitrogen!" said the poor woman as she re-entered her chamber, and burst into tears.

The phrase was unintelligible to her. Men, trained by education to have a general conception of everything, have no idea how distressing it is for a woman to be unable to comprehend the thought of the man she loves. More forbearing than we, these divine creatures do not let us know when the language of their souls is not understood by us; they shrink from letting us feel the superiority of their feelings, and hide their pain as gladly as they silence their wishes: but, having higher ambitions in love than men, they desire to wed not only the heart of a husband, but his mind.

To Madame Claes the sense of knowing nothing of a science which absorbed her husband filled her with a vexation as keen as the beauty of a rival might have caused. The struggle of woman against woman gives to her who loves the most the advantage of loving best; but a mortification like this only proved Madame Claes's powerlessness and humiliated the feelings by which she lived. She was ignorant; and she had reached a point where her ignorance parted her from her husband. Worse than all, last and keenest torture, he was risking his life, he was often in danger – near her, yet far away, and she might not share, nor even know, his peril. Her position became, like hell, a moral prison from which there was no issue, in which there was no hope. Madame Claes resolved to know at least the outward attractions of this fatal science, and she began secretly to study chemistry in the books. From this time the family became, as it were, cloistered.

Such were the successive changes brought by this dire misfortune upon the family of Claes, before it reached the species of atrophy in which we find it at the moment when this history begins.

The situation grew daily more complicated. Like all passionate women, Madame Claes was disinterested. Those who truly love know that considerations of money count for little in matters of feeling and are reluctantly associated with them. Nevertheless, Josephine did not hear without distress that her husband had borrowed three hundred thousand francs upon his property. The apparent authenticity of the transaction, the rumors and conjectures spread through the town, forced Madame Claes, naturally much alarmed, to question her husband's notary and, disregarding her pride, to reveal to him her secret anxieties or let him guess them, and even ask her the humiliating question, —

"How is it that Monsieur Claes has not told you of this?"

Happily, the notary was almost a relation, – in this wise: The grandfather of Monsieur Claes had married a Pierquin of Antwerp, of the same family as the Pierquins of Douai. Since the marriage the latter, though strangers to the Claes, claimed them as cousins. Monsieur Pierquin, a young man twenty-six years of age, who had just succeeded to his father's practice, was the only person who now had access to the House of Claes.

Madame Balthazar had lived for several months in such complete solitude that the notary was obliged not only to confirm the rumor of the disasters, but to give her further particulars, which were now well known throughout the town. He told her that it was probably that her husband owed

considerable sums of money to the house which furnished him with chemicals. That house, after making inquiries as to the fortune and credit of Monsieur Claes, accepted all his orders and sent the supplies without hesitation, notwithstanding the heavy sums of money which became due. Madame Claes requested Pierquin to obtain the bill for all the chemicals that had been furnished to her husband.

Two months later, Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, manufacturers of chemical products, sent in a schedule of accounts rendered, which amounted to over one hundred thousand francs. Madame Claes and Pierquin studied the document with an ever-increasing surprise. Though some articles, entered in commercial and scientific terms, were unintelligible to them, they were frightened to see entries of precious metals and diamonds of all kinds, though in small quantities. The large sum total of the debt was explained by the multiplicity of the articles, by the precautions needed in transporting some of them, more especially valuable machinery, by the exorbitant price of certain rare chemicals, and finally by the cost of instruments made to order after the designs of Monsieur Claes himself.

The notary had made inquiries, in his client's interest, as to Messieurs Protez and Chiffreville, and found that their known integrity was sufficient guarantee as to the honesty of their operations with Monsieur Claes, to whom, moreover, they frequently sent information of results obtained by chemists in Paris, for the purpose of sparing him expense. Madame Claes begged the notary to keep the nature of these purchases from the knowledge of the people of Douai, lest they should declare the whole thing a mania; but Pierquin replied that he had already delayed to the very last moment the notarial deeds which the importance of the sum borrowed necessitated, in order not to lessen the respect in which Monsieur Claes was held. He then revealed the full extent of the evil, telling her plainly that if she could not find means to prevent her husband from thus madly making way with his property, in six months the patrimonial fortune of the Claes would be mortgaged to its full value. As for himself, he said, the remonstrances he had already made to his cousin, with all the consideration due to a man so justly respected, had been wholly unavailing. Balthazar had replied, once for all, that he was working for the fame and the fortune of his family.

Thus, to the tortures of the heart which Madame Claes had borne for two years – one following the other with cumulative suffering – was now added a dreadful and ceaseless fear which made the future terrifying. Women have presentiments whose accuracy is often marvellous. Why do they fear so much more than they hope in matters that concern the interests of this life? Why is their faith given only to religious ideas of a future existence? Why do they so ably foresee the catastrophes of fortune and the crises of fate? Perhaps the sentiment which unites them to the men they love gives them a sense by which they weigh force, measure faculties, understand tastes, passions, vices, virtues. The perpetual study of these causes in the midst of which they live gives them, no doubt, the fatal power of foreseeing effects in all possible relations of earthly life. What they see of the present enables them to judge of the future with an intuitive ability explained by the perfection of their nervous system, which allows them to seize the lightest indications of thought and feeling. Their whole being vibrates in communion with great moral convulsions. Either they feel, or they see.

Now, although separated from her husband for over two years, Madame Claes foresaw the loss of their property. She fully understood the deliberate ardor, the well-considered, inalterable steadfastness of Balthazar; if it were indeed true that he was seeking to make gold, he was capable of throwing his last crust into the crucible with absolute indifference. But what was he really seeking? Up to this time maternal feeling and conjugal love had been so mingled in the heart of this woman that the children, equally beloved by husband and wife, had never come between them. Suddenly she found herself at times more mother than wife, though hitherto she had been more wife than mother. However ready she had been to sacrifice her fortune and even her children to the man who had chosen her, loved her, adored her, and to whom she was still the only woman in the world, the remorse she felt for the weakness of her maternal love threw her into terrible alternations of feeling. As a wife, she suffered in heart; as a mother, through her children; as a Christian, for all.

She kept silence, and hid the cruel struggle in her soul. Her husband, sole arbiter of the family fate, was the master by whose will it must be guided; he was responsible to God only. Besides, could she reproach him for the use he now made of his fortune, after the disinterestedness he had shown to her for many happy years? Was she to judge his purposes? And yet her conscience, in keeping with the spirit of the law, told her that parents were the depositaries and guardians of property, and possessed no right to alienate the material welfare of the children. To escape replying to such stern questions she preferred to shut her eyes, like one who refuses to see the abyss into whose depths he knows he is about to fall.

For more than six months her husband had given her no money for the household expenses. She sold secretly, in Paris, the handsome diamond ornaments her brother had given her on her marriage, and placed the family on a footing of the strictest economy. She sent away the governess of her children, and even the nurse of little Jean. Formerly the luxury of carriages and horses was unknown among the burgher families, so simple were they in their habits, so proud in their feelings; no provision for that modern innovation had therefore been made at the House of Claes, and Balthazar was obliged to have his stable and coach-house in a building opposite to his own house: his present occupations allowed him no time to superintend that portion of his establishment, which belongs exclusively to men. Madame Claes suppressed the whole expense of equipages and servants, which her present isolation from the world rendered unnecessary, and she did so without pretending to conceal the retrenchment under any pretext. So far, facts had contradicted her assertions, and silence for the future was more becoming: indeed the change in the family mode of living called for no explanation in a country where, as in Flanders, any one who lives up to his income is considered a madman.

And yet, as her eldest daughter, Marguerite, approached her sixteenth birthday, Madame Claes longed to procure for her a good marriage, and to place her in society in a manner suitable to a daughter of the Molinas, the Van Ostron-Temnincks, and the Casa-Reals. A few days before the one on which this story opens, the money derived from the sale of the diamonds had been exhausted. On the very day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, as Madame Claes was taking her children to vespers, she met Pierquin, who was on his way to see her, and who turned and accompanied her to the church, talking in a low voice of her situation.

"My dear cousin," he said, "unless I fail in the friendship which binds me to your family, I cannot conceal from you the peril of your position, nor refrain from begging you to speak to your husband. Who but you can hold him back from the gulf into which he is plunging? The rents from the mortgaged estates are not enough to pay the interest on the sums he has borrowed. If he cuts the wood on them he destroys your last chance of safety in the future. My cousin Balthazar owes at this moment thirty thousand francs to the house of Protez and Chiffreville. How can you pay them? What will you live on? If Claes persists in sending for reagents, retorts, voltaic batteries, and other such playthings, what will become of you? Your whole property, except the house and furniture, has been dissipated in gas and carbon; yesterday he talked of mortgaging the house, and in answer to a remark of mine, he cried out, 'The devil!' It was the first sign of reason I have known him show for three years."

Madame Claes pressed the notary's arm, and said in a tone of suffering, "Keep it secret."

Overwhelmed by these plain words of startling clearness, the poor woman, pious as she was, could not pray; she sat still on her chair between her children, with her prayer-book open, but not turning its leaves; her mind was sunk in meditations as absorbing as those of her husband. The Spanish sense of honor, the Flemish integrity, resounded in her soul with a peal louder than any organ. The ruin of her children was accomplished! Between them and their father's honor she must no longer hesitate. The necessity of a coming struggle with her husband terrified her; in her eyes he was so great, so majestic, that the mere prospect of his anger made her tremble as at a vision of the divine wrath. She must now depart from the submission she had sacredly practised as a wife. The interests of her children compelled her to oppose, in his most cherished tastes, the man she idolized. Must she not daily force him back to common matters from the higher realms of Science; drag him forcibly

from a smiling future and plunge him into a materialism hideous to artists and great men? To her, Balthazar Claes was a Titan of science, a man big with glory; he could only have forgotten her for the riches of a mighty hope. Then too, was he not profoundly wise? she had heard him talk with such good sense on every subject that he must be sincere when he declared he worked for the glory and prosperity of his family. His love for his wife and family was not only vast, it was infinite. That feeling could not be extinct; it was magnified, and reproduced in another form.

Noble, generous, timid as she was, she prepared herself to ring into the ears of this noble man the word and the sound of money, to show him the sores of poverty, and force him to hear cries of distress when he was listening only for the melodious voice of Fame. Perhaps his love for her would lessen! If she had had no children, she would bravely and joyously have welcomed the new destiny her husband was making for her. Women who are brought up in opulence are quick to feel the emptiness of material enjoyments; and when their hearts, more wearied than withered, have once learned the happiness of a constant interchange of real feelings, they feel no shrinking from reduced outward circumstances, provided they are still acceptable to the man who has loved them. Their wishes, their pleasures, are subordinated to the caprices of that other life outside of their own; to them the only dreadful future is to lose him.

At this moment, therefore, her children came between Pepita and her true life, just as Science had come between herself and Balthazar. And thus, when she reached home after vespers, and threw herself into the deep armchair before the window of the parlor, she sent away her children, directing them to keep perfectly quiet, and despatched a message to her husband, through Lemulquinier, saying that she wished to see him. But although the old valet did his best to make his master leave the laboratory, Balthazar scarcely heeded him. Madame Claes thus gained time for reflection. She sat thinking, paying no attention to the hour nor the light. The thought of owing thirty thousand francs that could not be paid renewed her past anguish and joined it to that of the present and the future. This influx of painful interests, ideas, and feelings overcame her, and she wept.

As Balthazar entered at last through the panelled door, the expression of his face seemed to her more dreadful, more absorbed, more distracted than she had yet seen it. When he made her no answer she was magnetized for a moment by the fixity of that blank look emptied of all expression, by the consuming ideas that issued as if distilled from that bald brow. Under the shock of this impression she wished to die. But when she heard the callous voice, uttering a scientific wish at the moment when her heart was breaking, her courage came back to her; she resolved to struggle with that awful power which had torn a lover from her arms, a father from her children, a fortune from their home, happiness from all. And yet she could not repress a trepidation which made her quiver; in all her life no such solemn scene as this had taken place. This dreadful moment – did it not virtually contain her future, and gather within it all the past?

Weak and timid persons, or those whose excessive sensibility magnifies the smallest difficulties of life, men who tremble involuntarily before the masters of their fate, can now, one and all, conceive the rush of thoughts that crowded into the brain of this woman, and the feelings under the weight of which her heart was crushed as her husband slowly crossed the room towards the garden-door. Most women know that agony of inward deliberation in which Madame Claes was writhing. Even one whose heart has been tried by nothing worse than the declaration to a husband of some extravagance, or a debt to a dress-maker, will understand how its pulses swell and quicken when the matter is one of life itself.

A beautiful or graceful woman might have thrown herself at her husband's feet, might have called to her aid the attitudes of grief; but to Madame Claes the sense of physical defects only added to her fears. When she saw Balthazar about to leave the room, her impulse was to spring towards him; then a cruel thought restrained her – she should stand before him! would she not seem ridiculous in the eyes of a man no longer under the glamour of love – who might see true? She resolved to avoid all dangerous chances at so solemn a moment, and remained seated, saying in a clear voice,

"Balthazar."

He turned mechanically and coughed; then, paying no attention to his wife, he walked to one of the little square boxes that are placed at intervals along the wainscoting of every room in Holland and Belgium, and spat in it. This man, who took no thought of other persons, never forgot the inveterate habit of using those boxes. To poor Josephine, unable to find a reason for this singularity, the constant care which her husband took of the furniture caused her at all times an unspeakable pang, but at this moment the pain was so violent that it put her beside herself and made her exclaim in a tone of impatience, which expressed her wounded feelings, —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.