HONORÉ DE BALZAC

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Оноре де Бальзак
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Содержание

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One of the few drawing-rooms where, under the Restoration, the Archbishop of Besancon was sometimes to be seen, was that of the Baronne de Watteville, to whom he was particularly attached on account of her religious sentiments.

A word as to this lady, the most important lady of Besancon.

Monsieur de Watteville, a descendant of the famous Watteville, the most successful and illustrious of murderers and renegades – his extraordinary adventures are too much a part of history to be related here – this nineteenth century Monsieur de Watteville was as gentle and peaceable as his ancestor of the *Grand Siecle* had been passionate and turbulent. After living in the *Comte* (La Franche Comte) like a wood-louse in the crack of a wainscot, he had married the heiress of the celebrated house of Rupt. Mademoiselle de Rupt brought twenty thousand francs a year in the funds to add to the ten thousand francs a year in real estate of the Baron de Watteville. The Swiss gentleman's coat-of-arms (the Wattevilles are Swiss) was then borne as an escutcheon of pretence on the old shield of the Rupts. The marriage, arranged in 1802, was solemnized in 1815 after the

second Restoration. Within three years of the birth of a daughter all Madame de Watteville's grandparents were dead, and their estates wound up. Monsieur de Watteville's house was then sold, and they settled in the Rue de la Prefecture in the fine old mansion of the Rupts, with an immense garden stretching to the Rue du Perron. Madame de Watteville, devout as a girl, became even more so after her marriage. She is one of the queens of the saintly brotherhood which gives the upper circles of Besancon a solemn air and prudish manners in harmony with the character of the town.

Monsieur le Baron de Watteville, a dry, lean man devoid of intelligence, looked worn out without any one knowing whereby, for he enjoyed the profoundest ignorance; but as his wife was a red-haired woman, and of a stern nature that became proverbial (we still say "as sharp as Madame de Watteville"), some wits of the legal profession declared that he had been worn against that rock —*Rupt* is obviously derived from *rupes*. Scientific students of social phenomena will not fail to have observed that Rosalie was the only offspring of the union between the Wattevilles and the Rupts.

Monsieur de Watteville spent his existence in a handsome workshop with a lathe; he was a turner! As subsidiary to this pursuit, he took up a fancy for making collections. Philosophical doctors, devoted to the study of madness, regard this tendency towards collecting as a first degree of mental aberration when it is set on small things. The Baron de Watteville treasured shells and

geological fragments of the neighborhood of Besancon. Some contradictory folk, especially women, would say of Monsieur de Watteville, "He has a noble soul! He perceived from the first days of his married life that he would never be his wife's master, so he threw himself into a mechanical occupation and good living."

The house of the Rupts was not devoid of a certain magnificence worthy of Louis XIV., and bore traces of the nobility of the two families who had mingled in 1815. The chandeliers of glass cut in the shape of leaves, the brocades, the damask, the carpets, the gilt furniture, were all in harmony with the old liveries and the old servants. Though served in blackened family plate, round a looking-glass tray furnished with Dresden china, the food was exquisite. The wines selected by Monsieur de Watteville, who, to occupy his time and vary his employments, was his own butler, enjoyed a sort of fame throughout the department. Madame de Watteville's fortune was a fine one; while her husband's, which consisted only of the estate of Rouxey, worth about ten thousand francs a year, was not increased by inheritance. It is needless to add that in consequence of Madame de Watteville's close intimacy with the Archbishop, the three or four clever or remarkable Abbes of the diocese who were not averse to good feeding were very much at home at her house.

At a ceremonial dinner given in honor of I know not whose wedding, at the beginning of September 1834, when the women were standing in a circle round the drawing-room fire, and

the men in groups by the windows, every one exclaimed with pleasure at the entrance of Monsieur l'Abbe de Grancey, who was announced.

"Well, and the lawsuit?" they all cried.

"Won!" replied the Vicar-General. "The verdict of the Court, from which we had no hope, you know why – "

This was an allusion to the members of the First Court of Appeal of 1830; the Legitimists had almost all withdrawn.

"The verdict is in our favor on every point, and reverses the decision of the Lower Court."

"Everybody thought you were done for."

"And we should have been, but for me. I told our advocate to be off to Paris, and at the crucial moment I was able to secure a new pleader, to whom we owe our victory, a wonderful man – "

"At Besancon?" said Monsieur de Watteville, guilelessly.

"At Besancon," replied the Abbe de Grancey.

"Oh yes, Savaron," said a handsome young man sitting near the Baroness, and named de Soulas.

"He spent five or six nights over it; he devoured documents and briefs; he had seven or eight interviews of several hours with me," continued Monsieur de Grancey, who had just reappeared at the Hotel de Rupt for the first time in three weeks. "In short, Monsieur Savaron has just completely beaten the celebrated lawyer whom our adversaries had sent for from Paris. This young man is wonderful, the bigwigs say. Thus the chapter is twice victorious; it has triumphed in law and also in politics, since it

has vanquished Liberalism in the person of the Counsel of our Municipality. – 'Our adversaries,' so our advocate said, 'must not expect to find readiness on all sides to ruin the Archbishoprics.' – The President was obliged to enforce silence. All the townsfolk of Besancon applauded. Thus the possession of the buildings of the old convent remains with the Chapter of the Cathedral of Besancon. Monsieur Savaron, however, invited his Parisian opponent to dine with him as they came out of court. He accepted, saying, 'Honor to every conqueror,' and complimented him on his success without bitterness."

"And where did you unearth this lawyer?" said Madame de Watteville. "I never heard his name before."

"Why, you can see his windows from hence," replied the Vicar-General. "Monsieur Savaron lives in the Rue du Perron; the garden of his house joins on to yours."

"But he is not a native of the Comte," said Monsieur de Watteville.

"So little is he a native of any place, that no one knows where he comes from," said Madame de Chavoncourt.

"But who is he?" asked Madame de Watteville, taking the Abbe's arm to go into the dining-room. "If he is a stranger, by what chance has he settled at Besancon? It is a strange fancy for a barrister."

"Very strange!" echoed Amedee de Soulas, whose biography is here necessary to the understanding of this tale.

In all ages France and England have carried on an exchange

of trifles, which is all the more constant because it evades the tyranny of the Custom-house. The fashion that is called English in Paris is called French in London, and this is reciprocal. The hostility of the two nations is suspended on two points – the uses of words and the fashions of dress. *God Save the King*, the national air of England, is a tune written by Lulli for the Chorus of Esther or of Athalie. Hoops, introduced at Paris by an Englishwoman, were invented in London, it is known why, by a Frenchwoman, the notorious Duchess of Portsmouth. They were at first so jeered at that the first Englishwoman who appeared in them at the Tuileries narrowly escaped being crushed by the crowd; but they were adopted. This fashion tyrannized over the ladies of Europe for half a century. At the peace of 1815, for a year, the long waists of the English were a standing jest; all Paris went to see Pothier and Brunet in *Les Anglaises pour rire*; but in 1816 and 1817 the belt of the Frenchwoman, which in 1814 cut her across the bosom, gradually descended till it reached the hips.

Within ten years England has made two little gifts to our language. The *Incroyable*, the *Merveilleux*, the *Elegant*, the three successes of the *petit-maitre* of discreditable etymology, have made way for the "dandy" and the "lion." The *lion* is not the parent of the *lionne*. The *lionne* is due to the famous song by Alfred de Musset:

> Avez vous vu dans Barcelone
> … C'est ma maitresse et ma lionne.

There has been a fusion – or, if you prefer it, a confusion – of the two words and the leading ideas. When an absurdity can amuse Paris, which devours as many masterpieces as absurdities, the provinces can hardly be deprived of them. So, as soon as the *lion* paraded Paris with his mane, his beard and moustaches, his waistcoats and his eyeglass, maintained in its place, without the help of his hands, by the contraction of his cheek, and eye-socket, the chief towns of some departments had their sub-lions, who protested by the smartness of their trouser-straps against the untidiness of their fellow-townsmen.

Thus, in 1834, Besancon could boast of a *lion*, in the person of Monsieur Amedee-Sylvain de Soulas, spelt Souleyas at the time of the Spanish occupation. Amedee de Soulas is perhaps the only man in Besancon descended from a Spanish family. Spain sent men to manage her business in the Comte, but very few Spaniards settled there. The Soulas remained in consequence of their connection with Cardinal Granvelle. Young Monsieur de Soulas was always talking of leaving Besancon, a dull town, church-going, and not literary, a military centre and garrison town, of which the manners and customs and physiognomy are worth describing. This opinion allowed of his lodging, like a man uncertain of the future, in three very scantily furnished rooms at the end of the Rue Neuve, just where it opens into the Rue de la Prefecture.

Young Monsieur de Soulas could not possibly live without

a tiger. This tiger was the son of one of his farmers, a small servant aged fourteen, thick-set, and named Babylas. The lion dressed his tiger very smartly – a short tunic-coat of iron-gray cloth, belted with patent leather, bright blue plush breeches, a red waistcoat, polished leather top-boots, a shiny hat with black lacing, and brass buttons with the arms of Soulas. Amedee gave this boy white cotton gloves and his washing, and thirty-six francs a month to keep himself – a sum that seemed enormous to the grisettes of Besancon: four hundred and twenty francs a year to a child of fifteen, without counting extras! The extras consisted in the price for which he could sell his turned clothes, a present when Soulas exchanged one of his horses, and the perquisite of the manure. The two horses, treated with sordid economy, cost, one with another, eight hundred francs a year. His bills for articles received from Paris, such as perfumery, cravats, jewelry, patent blacking, and clothes, ran to another twelve hundred francs. Add to this the groom, or tiger, the horses, a very superior style of dress, and six hundred francs a year for rent, and you will see a grand total of three thousand francs.

Now, Monsieur de Soulas' father had left him only four thousand francs a year, the income from some cottage farms which lent painful uncertainty to the rents. The lion had hardly three francs a day left for food, amusements, and gambling. He very often dined out, and breakfasted with remarkable frugality. When he was positively obliged to dine at his own cost, he sent his tiger to fetch a couple of dishes from a cookshop, never spending

more than twenty-five sous.

Young Monsieur de Soulas was supposed to be a spendthrift, recklessly extravagant, whereas the poor man made the two ends meet in the year with a keenness and skill which would have done honor to a thrifty housewife. At Besancon in those days no one knew how great a tax on a man's capital were six francs spent in polish to spread on his boots or shoes, yellow gloves at fifty sous a pair, cleaned in the deepest secrecy to make them three times renewed, cravats costing ten francs, and lasting three months, four waistcoats at twenty-five francs, and trousers fitting close to the boots. How could he do otherwise, since we see women in Paris bestowing their special attention on simpletons who visit them, and cut out the most remarkable men by means of these frivolous advantages, which a man can buy for fifteen louis, and get his hair curled and a fine linen shirt into the bargain?

If this unhappy youth should seem to you to have become a *lion* on very cheap terms, you must know that Amedee de Soulas had been three times to Switzerland, by coach and in short stages, twice to Paris, and once from Paris to England. He passed as a well-informed traveler, and could say, "In England, where I went…" The dowagers of the town would say to him, "You, who have been in England…" He had been as far as Lombardy, and seen the shores of the Italian lakes. He read new books. Finally, when he was cleaning his gloves, the tiger Babylas replied to callers, "Monsieur is very busy." An attempt had been made to withdraw Monsieur Amedee de Soulas from circulation by

pronouncing him “A man of advanced ideas.” Amedee had the gift of uttering with the gravity of a native the commonplaces that were in fashion, which gave him the credit of being one of the most enlightened of the nobility. His person was garnished with fashionable trinkets, and his head furnished with ideas hall-marked by the press.

In 1834 Amedee was a young man of five-and-twenty, of medium height, dark, with a very prominent thorax, well-made shoulders, rather plump legs, feet already fat, white dimpled hands, a beard under his chin, moustaches worthy of the garrison, a good-natured, fat, rubicund face, a flat nose, and brown expressionless eyes; nothing Spanish about him. He was progressing rapidly in the direction of obesity, which would be fatal to his pretensions. His nails were well kept, his beard trimmed, the smallest details of his dress attended to with English precision. Hence Amedee de Soulas was looked upon as the finest man in Besancon. A hairdresser who waited upon him at a fixed hour – another luxury, costing sixty francs a year – held him up as the sovereign authority in matters of fashion and elegance.

Amedee slept late, dressed and went out towards noon, to go to one of his farms and practise pistol-shooting. He attached as much importance to this exercise as Lord Byron did in his later days. Then, at three o’clock he came home, admired on horseback by the grisettes and the ladies who happened to be at their windows. After an affectation of study or business, which seemed to engage him till four, he dressed to dine out, spent

the evening in the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy of Besancon playing whist, and went home to bed at eleven. No life could be more above board, more prudent, or more irreproachable, for he punctually attended the services at church on Sundays and holy days.

To enable you to understand how exceptional is such a life, it is necessary to devote a few words to an account of Besancon. No town ever offered more deaf and dumb resistance to progress. At Besancon the officials, the *employes*, the military, in short, every one engaged in governing it, sent thither from Paris to fill a post of any kind, are all spoken of by the expressive general name of *the Colony*. The colony is neutral ground, the only ground where, as in church, the upper rank and the townsfolk of the place can meet. Here, fired by a word, a look, or gesture, are started those feuds between house and house, between a woman of rank and a citizen's wife, which endure till death, and widen the impassable gulf which parts the two classes of society. With the exception of the Clermont-Mont-Saint-Jean, the Beauffremont, the de Scey, and the Gramont families, with a few others who come only to stay on their estates in the Comte, the aristocracy of Besancon dates no further back than a couple of centuries, the time of the conquest by Louis XIV. This little world is essentially of the *parlement*, and arrogant, stiff, solemn, uncompromising, haughty beyond all comparison, even with the Court of Vienna, for in this the nobility of Besancon would put the Viennese drawing-rooms to shame. As to Victor Hugo, Nodier, Fourier, the glories

of the town, they are never mentioned, no one thinks about them. The marriages in these families are arranged in the cradle, so rigidly are the greatest things settled as well as the smallest. No stranger, no intruder, ever finds his way into one of these houses, and to obtain an introduction for the colonels or officers of title belonging to the first families in France when quartered there, requires efforts of diplomacy which Prince Talleyrand would gladly have mastered to use at a congress.

In 1834 Amedee was the only man in Besancon who wore trouser-straps; this will account for the young man's being regarded as a lion. And a little anecdote will enable you to understand the city of Besancon.

Some time before the opening of this story, the need arose at the prefecture for bringing an editor from Paris for the official newspaper, to enable it to hold its own against the little *Gazette*, dropped at Besancon by the great *Gazette*, and the *Patriot*, which frisked in the hands of the Republicans. Paris sent them a young man, knowing nothing about la Franche Comte, who began by writing them a leading article of the school of the *Charivari*. The chief of the moderate party, a member of the municipal council, sent for the journalist and said to him, "You must understand, monsieur, that we are serious, more than serious – tiresome; we resent being amused, and are furious at having been made to laugh. Be as hard of digestion as the toughest disquisitions in the Revue des Deux Mondes, and you will hardly reach the level of Besancon."

The editor took the hint, and thenceforth spoke the most incomprehensible philosophical lingo. His success was complete.

If young Monsieur de Soulas did not fall in the esteem of Besancon society, it was out of pure vanity on its part; the aristocracy were happy to affect a modern air, and to be able to show any Parisians of rank who visited the Comte a young man who bore some likeness to them.

All this hidden labor, all this dust thrown in people's eyes, this display of folly and latent prudence, had an object, or the *lion* of Besancon would have been no son of the soil. Amedee wanted to achieve a good marriage by proving some day that his farms were not mortgaged, and that he had some savings. He wanted to be the talk of the town, to be the finest and best-dressed man there, in order to win first the attention, and then the hand, of Mademoiselle Rosalie de Watteville.

In 1830, at the time when young Monsieur de Soulas was setting up in business as a dandy, Rosalie was but fourteen. Hence, in 1834, Mademoiselle de Watteville had reached the age when young persons are easily struck by the peculiarities which attracted the attention of the town to Amedee. There are so many *lions* who become *lions* out of self-interest and speculation. The Wattevilles, who for twelve years had been drawing an income of fifty thousand francs a year, did not spend more than four-and-twenty thousand francs a year, while receiving all the upper circle of Besancon every Monday and Friday. On Monday they gave a dinner, on Friday an evening party. Thus, in twelve years, what

a sum must have accumulated from twenty-six thousand francs a year, saved and invested with the judgment that distinguishes those old families! It was very generally supposed that Madame de Watteville, thinking she had land enough, had placed her savings in the three per cents, in 1830. Rosalie's dowry would therefore, as the best informed opined, amount to about twenty thousand francs a year. So for the last five years Amedee had worked like a mole to get into the highest favor of the severe Baroness, while laying himself out to flatter Mademoiselle de Watteville's conceit.

Madame de Watteville was in the secret of the devices by which Amedee succeeded in keeping up his rank in Besancon, and esteemed him highly for it. Soulas had placed himself under her wing when she was thirty, and at that time had dared to admire her and make her his idol; he had got so far as to be allowed – he alone in the world – to pour out to her all the unseemly gossip which almost all very precise women love to hear, being authorized by their superior virtue to look into the gulf without falling, and into the devil's snares without being caught. Do you understand why the lion did not allow himself the very smallest intrigue? He lived a public life, in the street so to speak, on purpose to play the part of a lover sacrificed to duty by the Baroness, and to feast her mind with the sins she had forbidden to her senses. A man who is so privileged as to be allowed to pour light stories into the ear of a bigot is in her eyes a charming man. If this exemplary youth had better known the

human heart, he might without risk have allowed himself some flirtations among the grisettes of Besancon who looked up to him as a king; his affairs might perhaps have been all the more hopeful with the strict and prudish Baroness. To Rosalie our Cato affected prodigality; he professed a life of elegance, showing her in perspective the splendid part played by a woman of fashion in Paris, whither he meant to go as Depute.

All these manoeuvres were crowned with complete success. In 1834 the mothers of the forty noble families composing the high society of Besancon quoted Monsieur Amedee de Soulas as the most charming young man in the town; no one would have dared to dispute his place as cock of the walk at the Hotel de Rupt, and all Besancon regarded him as Rosalie de Watteville's future husband. There had even been some exchange of ideas on the subject between the Baroness and Amedee, to which the Baron's apparent nonentity gave some certainty.

Mademoiselle de Watteville, to whom her enormous prospective fortune at that time lent considerable importance, had been brought up exclusively within the precincts of the Hotel de Rupt – which her mother rarely quitted, so devoted was she to her dear Archbishop – and severely repressed by an exclusively religious education, and by her mother's despotism, which held her rigidly to principles. Rosalie knew absolutely nothing. Is it knowledge to have learned geography from Guthrie, sacred history, ancient history, the history of France, and the four rules all passed through the sieve of an old Jesuit? Dancing and music

were forbidden, as being more likely to corrupt life than to grace it. The Baroness taught her daughter every conceivable stitch in tapestry and women's work – plain sewing, embroidery, netting. At seventeen Rosalie had never read anything but the *Lettres edifiantes* and some works on heraldry. No newspaper had ever defiled her sight. She attended mass at the Cathedral every morning, taken there by her mother, came back to breakfast, did needlework after a little walk in the garden, and received visitors, sitting with the baroness until dinner-time. Then, after dinner, excepting on Mondays and Fridays, she accompanied Madame de Watteville to other houses to spend the evening, without being allowed to talk more than the maternal rule permitted.

At eighteen Mademoiselle de Watteville was a slight, thin girl with a flat figure, fair, colorless, and insignificant to the last degree. Her eyes, of a very light blue, borrowed beauty from their lashes, which, when downcast, threw a shadow on her cheeks. A few freckles marred the whiteness of her forehead, which was shapely enough. Her face was exactly like those of Albert Durer's saints, or those of the painters before Perugino; the same plump, though slender modeling, the same delicacy saddened by ecstasy, the same severe guilelessness. Everything about her, even to her attitude, was suggestive of those virgins, whose beauty is only revealed in its mystical radiance to the eyes of the studious connoisseur. She had fine hands though red, and a pretty foot, the foot of an aristocrat.

She habitually wore simple checked cotton dresses; but on

Sundays and in the evening her mother allowed her silk. The cut of her frocks, made at Besancon, almost made her ugly, while her mother tried to borrow grace, beauty, and elegance from Paris fashions; for through Monsieur de Soulas she procured the smallest trifles of her dress from thence. Rosalie had never worn a pair of silk stockings or thin boots, but always cotton stockings and leather shoes. On high days she was dressed in a muslin frock, her hair plainly dressed, and had bronze kid shoes.

This education, and her own modest demeanor, hid in Rosalie a spirit of iron. Physiologists and profound observers will tell you, perhaps to your astonishment, that tempers, characteristics, wit, or genius reappear in families at long intervals, precisely like what are known as hereditary diseases. Thus talent, like the gout, sometimes skips over two generations. We have an illustrious example of this phenomenon in George Sand, in whom are resuscitated the force, the power, and the imaginative faculty of the Marechal de Saxe, whose natural granddaughter she is.

The decisive character and romantic daring of the famous Watteville had reappeared in the soul of his grand-niece, reinforced by the tenacity and pride of blood of the Rupts. But these qualities – or faults, if you will have it so – were as deeply buried in this young girlish soul, apparently so weak and yielding, as the seething lavas within a hill before it becomes a volcano. Madame de Watteville alone, perhaps, suspected this inheritance from two strains. She was so severe to her Rosalie, that she replied one day to the Archbishop, who blamed her for being

too hard on the child, “Leave me to manage her, monseigneur. I know her! She has more than one Beelzebub in her skin!”

The Baroness kept all the keener watch over her daughter, because she considered her honor as a mother to be at stake. After all, she had nothing else to do. Clotilde de Rupt, at this time five-and-thirty, and as good as widowed, with a husband who turned egg-cups in every variety of wood, who set his mind on making wheels with six spokes out of iron-wood, and manufactured snuff-boxes for everyone of his acquaintance, flirted in strict propriety with Amedee de Soulas. When this young man was in the house, she alternately dismissed and recalled her daughter, and tried to detect symptoms of jealousy in that youthful soul, so as to have occasion to repress them. She imitated the police in its dealings with the republicans; but she labored in vain. Rosalie showed no symptoms of rebellion. Then the arid bigot accused her daughter of perfect insensibility. Rosalie knew her mother well enough to be sure that if she had thought young Monsieur de Soulas *nice*, she would have drawn down on herself a smart reproof. Thus, to all her mother’s incitement she replied merely by such phrases as are wrongly called Jesuitical – wrongly, because the Jesuits were strong, and such reservations are the *chevaux de frise* behind which weakness takes refuge. Then the mother regarded the girl as a dissembler. If by mischance a spark of the true nature of the Wattevilles and the Rupts blazed out, the mother armed herself with the respect due from children to their parents to reduce Rosalie to passive

obedience.

This covert battle was carried on in the most secret seclusion of domestic life, with closed doors. The Vicar-General, the dear Abbe Grancey, the friend of the late Archbishop, clever as he was in his capacity of the chief Father Confessor of the diocese, could not discover whether the struggle had stirred up some hatred between the mother and daughter, whether the mother were jealous in anticipation, or whether the court Amedee was paying to the girl through her mother had not overstepped its due limits. Being a friend of the family, neither mother nor daughter, confessed to him. Rosalie, a little too much harried, morally, about young de Soulas, could not abide him, to use a homely phrase, and when he spoke to her, trying to take her heart by surprise, she received him but coldly. This aversion, discerned only by her mother's eyes, was a constant subject of admonition.

"Rosalie, I cannot imagine why you affect such coldness towards Amedee. Is it because he is a friend of the family, and because we like him – your father and I?"

"Well, mamma," replied the poor child one day, "if I made him welcome, should I not be still more in the wrong?"

"What do you mean by that?" cried Madame de Watteville. "What is the meaning of such words? Your mother is unjust, no doubt, and according to you, would be so in any case! Never let such an answer pass your lips again to your mother – " and so forth.

This quarrel lasted three hours and three-quarters. Rosalie

noted the time. Her mother, pale with fury, sent her to her room, where Rosalie pondered on the meaning of this scene without discovering it, so guileless was she. Thus young Monsieur de Soulas, who was supposed by every one to be very near the end he was aiming at, all neckcloths set, and by dint of pots of patent blacking – an end which required so much waxing of his moustaches, so many smart waistcoats, wore out so many horseshoes and stays – for he wore a leather vest, the stays of the *lion*– Amedee, I say, was further away than any chance comer, although he had on his side the worthy and noble Abbe de Grancey.

"Madame," said Monsieur de Soulas, addressing the Baroness, while waiting till his soup was cool enough to swallow, and affecting to give a romantic turn to his narrative, "one fine morning the mail coach dropped at the Hotel National a gentleman from Paris, who, after seeking apartments, made up his mind in favor of the first floor in Mademoiselle Galard's house, Rue du Perron. Then the stranger went straight to the Mairie, and had himself registered as a resident with all political qualifications. Finally, he had his name entered on the list of the barristers to the Court, showing his title in due form, and he left his card on all his new colleagues, the Ministerial officials, the Councillors of the Court, and the members of the bench, with the name, 'ALBERT SAVARON.'"

"The name of Savaron is famous," said Mademoiselle de Watteville, who was strong in heraldic information. "The

Savarons of Savarus are one of the oldest, noblest, and richest families in Belgium."

"He is a Frenchman, and no man's son," replied Amedee de Soulas. "If he wishes to bear the arms of the Savarons of Savarus, he must add a bar-sinister. There is no one left of the Brabant family but a Mademoiselle de Savarus, a rich heiress, and unmarried."

"The bar-sinister is, of course, the badge of a bastard; but the bastard of a Comte de Savarus is noble," answered Rosalie.

"Enough, that will do, mademoiselle!" said the Baroness.

"You insisted on her learning heraldry," said Monsieur de Watteville, "and she knows it very well."

"Go on, I beg, Monsieur de Soulas."

"You may suppose that in a town where everything is classified, known, pigeon-holed, ticketed, and numbered, as in Besancon, Albert Savaron was received without hesitation by the lawyers of the town. They were satisfied to say, 'Here is a man who does not know his Besancon. Who the devil can have sent him here? What can he hope to do? Sending his card to the Judges instead of calling in person! What a blunder!' And so, three days after, Savaron had ceased to exist. He took as his servant old Monsieur Galard's man – Galard being dead – Jerome, who can cook a little. Albert Savaron was all the more completely forgotten, because no one had seen him or met him anywhere."

"Then, does he not go to mass?" asked Madame de

Chavoncourt.

"He goes on Sundays to Saint-Pierre, but to the early service at eight in the morning. He rises every night between one and two in the morning, works till eight, has his breakfast, and then goes on working. He walks in his garden, going round fifty, or perhaps sixty times; then he goes in, dines, and goes to bed between six and seven."

"How did you learn all that?" Madame de Chavoncourt asked Monsieur de Soulas.

"In the first place, madame, I live in the Rue Neuve, at the corner of the Rue du Perron; I look out on the house where this mysterious personage lodges; then, of course, there are communications between my tiger and Jerome."

"And you gossip with Babylas?"

"What would you have me do out riding?"

"Well – and how was it that you engaged a stranger for your defence?" asked the Baroness, thus placing the conversation in the hands of the Vicar-General.

"The President of the Court played this pleader a trick by appointing him to defend at the Assizes a half-witted peasant accused of forgery. But Monsieur Savaron procured the poor man's acquittal by proving his innocence and showing that he had been a tool in the hands of the real culprits. Not only did his line of defence succeed, but it led to the arrest of two of the witnesses, who were proved guilty and condemned. His speech struck the Court and the jury. One of these, a merchant, placed

a difficult case next day in the hands of Monsieur Savaron, and he won it. In the position in which we found ourselves, Monsieur Berryer finding it impossible to come to Besancon, Monsieur de Garcenault advised him to employ this Monsieur Albert Savaron, foretelling our success. As soon as I saw him and heard him, I felt faith in him, and I was not wrong."

"Is he then so extraordinary?" asked Madame de Chavoncourt.

"Certainly, madame," replied the Vicar-General.

"Well, tell us about it," said Madame de Watteville.

"The first time I saw him," said the Abbe de Grancey, "he received me in his outer room next the ante-room – old Galard's drawing-room – which he has had painted like old oak, and which I found entirely lined with law-books, arranged on shelves also painted as old oak. The painting and the books are the sole decoration of the room, for the furniture consists of an old writing table of carved wood, six old armchairs covered with tapestry, window curtains of gray stuff bordered with green, and a green carpet over the floor. The ante-room stove heats this library as well. As I waited there I did not picture my advocate as a young man. But this singular setting is in perfect harmony with his person; for Monsieur Savaron came out in a black merino dressing-gown tied with a red cord, red slippers, a red flannel waistcoat, and a red smoking-cap."

"The devil's colors!" exclaimed Madame de Watteville.

"Yes," said the Abbe; "but a magnificent head. Black hair

already streaked with a little gray, hair like that of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in pictures, with thick shining curls, hair as stiff as horse-hair; a round white throat like a woman's; a splendid forehead, furrowed by the strong median line which great schemes, great thoughts, deep meditations stamp on a great man's brow; an olive complexion marbled with red, a square nose, eyes of flame, hollow cheeks, with two long lines, betraying much suffering, a mouth with a sardonic smile, and a small chin, narrow, and too short; crow's feet on his temples; deep-set eyes, moving in their sockets like burning balls; but, in spite of all these indications of a violently passionate nature, his manner was calm, deeply resigned, and his voice of penetrating sweetness, which surprised me in Court by its easy flow; a true orator's voice, now clear and appealing, sometimes insinuating, but a voice of thunder when needful, and lending itself to sarcasm to become incisive.

"Monsieur Albert Savaron is of middle height, neither stout nor thin. And his hands are those of a prelate.

"The second time I called on him he received me in his bedroom, adjoining the library, and smiled at my astonishment when I saw there a wretched chest of drawers, a shabby carpet, a camp-bed, and cotton window-curtains. He came out of his private room, to which no one is admitted, as Jerome informed me; the man did not go in, but merely knocked at the door.

"The third time he was breakfasting in his library on the most frugal fare; but on this occasion, as he had spent the night

studying our documents, as I had my attorney with me, and as that worthy Monsieur Girardet is long-winded, I had leisure to study the stranger. He certainly is no ordinary man. There is more than one secret behind that face, at once so terrible and so gentle, patient and yet impatient, broad and yet hollow. I saw, too, that he stooped a little, like all men who have some heavy burden to bear."

"Why did so eloquent a man leave Paris? For what purpose did he come to Besancon?" asked pretty Madame de Chavoncourt. "Could no one tell him how little chance a stranger has of succeeding here? The good folks of Besancon will make use of him, but they will not allow him to make use of them. Why, having come, did he make so little effort that it needed a freak of the President's to bring him forward?"

"After carefully studying that fine head," said the Abbe, looking keenly at the lady who had interrupted him, in such a way as to suggest that there was something he would not tell, "and especially after hearing him this morning reply to one of the bigwigs of the Paris Bar, I believe that this man, who may be five-and-thirty, will by and by make a great sensation."

"Why should we discuss him? You have gained your action, and paid him," said Madame de Watteville, watching her daughter, who, all the time the Vicar-General had been speaking, seemed to hang on his lips.

The conversation changed, and no more was heard of Albert Savaron.

The portrait sketched by the cleverest of the Vicars-General of the diocese had all the greater charm for Rosalie because there was a romance behind it. For the first time in her life she had come across the marvelous, the exceptional, which smiles on every youthful imagination, and which curiosity, so eager at Rosalie's age, goes forth to meet half-way. What an ideal being was this Albert – gloomy, unhappy, eloquent, laborious, as compared by Mademoiselle de Watteville to that chubby fat Count, bursting with health, paying compliments, and talking of the fashions in the very face of the splendor of the old counts of Rupt. Amedee had cost her many quarrels and scoldings, and, indeed, she knew him only too well; while this Albert Savaron offered many enigmas to be solved.

"Albert Savaron de Savarus," she repeated to herself.

Now, to see him, to catch sight of him! This was the desire of the girl to whom desire was hitherto unknown. She pondered in her heart, in her fancy, in her brain, the least phrases used by the Abbe de Grancey, for all his words had told.

"A fine forehead!" said she to herself, looking at the head of every man seated at the table; "I do not see one fine one. – Monsieur de Soulas' is too prominent; Monsieur de Grancey's is fine, but he is seventy, and has no hair, it is impossible to see where his forehead ends."

"What is the matter, Rosalie; you are eating nothing?"

"I am not hungry, mamma," said she. "A prelate's hands – " she went on to herself. "I cannot remember our handsome

Archbishop's hands, though he confirmed me."

Finally, in the midst of her coming and going in the labyrinth of her meditations, she remembered a lighted window she had seen from her bed, gleaming through the trees of the two adjoining gardens, when she had happened to wake in the night… "Then that was his light!" thought she. "I might see him! – I will see him."

"Monsieur de Grancey, is the Chapter's lawsuit quite settled?" said Rosalie point-blank to the Vicar-General, during a moment of silence.

Madame de Watteville exchanged rapid glances with the Vicar-General.

"What can that matter to you, my dear child?" she said to Rosalie, with an affected sweetness which made her daughter cautious for the rest of her days.

"It might be carried to the Court of Appeal, but our adversaries will think twice about that," replied the Abbe.

"I never could have believed that Rosalie would think about a lawsuit all through a dinner," remarked Madame de Watteville.

"Nor I either," said Rosalie, in a dreamy way that made every one laugh. "But Monsieur de Grancey was so full of it, that I was interested."

The company rose from table and returned to the drawing-room. All through the evening Rosalie listened in case Albert Savaron should be mentioned again; but beyond the congratulations offered by each newcomer to the Abbe on

having gained his suit, to which no one added any praise of the advocate, no more was said about it. Mademoiselle de Watteville impatiently looked forward to bedtime. She had promised herself to wake at between two and three in the morning, and to look at Albert's dressing-room windows. When the hour came, she felt almost pleasure in gazing at the glimmer from the lawyer's candles that shone through the trees, now almost bare of their leaves. By the help of the strong sight of a young girl, which curiosity seems to make longer, she saw Albert writing, and fancied she could distinguish the color of the furniture, which she thought was red. From the chimney above the roof rose a thick column of smoke.

"While all the world is sleeping, he is awake – like God!" thought she.

The education of girls brings with it such serious problems – for the future of a nation is in the mother – that the University of France long since set itself the task of having nothing to do with it. Here is one of these problems: Ought girls to be informed on all points? Ought their minds to be under restraint? It need not be said that the religious system is one of restraint. If you enlighten them, you make them demons before their time; if you keep them from thinking, you end in the sudden explosion so well shown by Moliere in the character of Agnes, and you leave this suppressed mind, so fresh and clear-seeing, as swift and as logical as that of a savage, at the mercy of an accident. This inevitable crisis was brought on in Mademoiselle de Watteville by the portrait

which one of the most prudent Abbes of the Chapter of Besancon imprudently allowed himself to sketch at a dinner party.

Next morning, Mademoiselle de Watteville, while dressing, necessarily looked out at Albert Savaron walking in the garden adjoining that of the Hotel de Rupt.

"What would have become of me," thought she, "if he had lived anywhere else? Here I can, at any rate, see him. – What is he thinking about?"

Having seen this extraordinary man, though at a distance, the only man whose countenance stood forth in contrast with crowds of Besancon faces she had hitherto met with, Rosalie at once jumped at the idea of getting into his house, of ascertaining the reason of so much mystery, of hearing that eloquent voice, of winning a glance from those fine eyes. All this she set her heart on, but how could she achieve it?

All that day she drew her needle through her embroidery with the obtuse concentration of a girl who, like Agnes, seems to be thinking of nothing, but who is reflecting on things in general so deeply, that her artifice is unfailing. As a result of this profound meditation, Rosalie thought she would go to confession. Next morning, after Mass, she had a brief interview with the Abbe Giroud at Saint-Pierre, and managed so ingeniously that the hour of her confession was fixed for Sunday morning at half-past seven, before the eight o'clock Mass. She committed herself to a dozen fibs in order to find herself, just for once, in the church at the hour when the lawyer came to Mass. Then she was seized

with an impulse of extreme affection for her father; she went to see him in his workroom, and asked him for all sorts of information on the art of turning, ending by advising him to turn larger pieces, columns. After persuading her father to set to work on some twisted pillars, one of the difficulties of the turner's art, she suggested that he should make use of a large heap of stones that lay in the middle of the garden to construct a sort of grotto on which he might erect a little temple or Belvedere in which his twisted pillars could be used and shown off to all the world.

At the climax of the pleasure the poor unoccupied man derived from this scheme, Rosalie said, as she kissed him, "Above all, do not tell mamma who gave you the notion; she would scold me."

"Do not be afraid!" replied Monsieur de Watteville, who groaned as bitterly as his daughter under the tyranny of the terrible descendant of the Rupts.

So Rosalie had a certain prospect of seeing ere long a charming observatory built, whence her eye would command the lawyer's private room. And there are men for whose sake young girls can carry out such masterstrokes of diplomacy, while, for the most part, like Albert Savaron, they know it not.

The Sunday so impatiently looked for arrived, and Rosalie dressed with such carefulness as made Mariette, the ladies'-maid, smile.

"It is the first time I ever knew mademoiselle to be so fidgety," said Mariette.

"It strikes me," said Rosalie, with a glance at Mariette, which brought poppies to her cheeks, "that you too are more particular on some days than on others."

As she went down the steps, across the courtyard, and through the gates, Rosalie's heart beat, as everybody's does in anticipation of a great event. Hitherto, she had never known what it was to walk in the streets; for a moment she had felt as though her mother must read her schemes on her brow, and forbid her going to confession, and she now felt new blood in her feet, she lifted them as though she trod on fire. She had, of course, arranged to be with her confessor at a quarter-past eight, telling her mother eight, so as to have about a quarter of an hour near Albert. She got to church before Mass, and after a short prayer, went to see if the Abbe Giroud were in his confessional, simply to pass the time; and she thus placed herself in such a way as to see Albert as he came into church.

The man must have been atrociously ugly who did not seem handsome to Mademoiselle de Watteville in the frame of mind produced by her curiosity. And Albert Savaron, who was really very striking, made all the more impression on Rosalie because his mien, his walk, his carriage, everything down to his clothing, had the indescribable stamp which can only be expressed by the word Mystery.

He came in. The church, till now gloomy, seemed to Rosalie to be illuminated. The girl was fascinated by his slow and solemn demeanor, as of a man who bears a world on his shoulders and

whose deep gaze, whose very gestures, combine to express a devastating or absorbing thought. Rosalie now understood the Vicar-General's words in their fullest extent. Yes, those eyes of tawny brown, shot with golden lights, covered ardor which revealed itself in sudden flashes. Rosalie, with a recklessness which Mariette noted, stood in the lawyer's way, so as to exchange glances with him; and this glance turned her blood, for it seethed and boiled as though its warmth were doubled.

As soon as Albert had taken a seat, Mademoiselle de Watteville quickly found a place whence she could see him perfectly during all the time the Abbe might leave her. When Mariette said, "Here is Monsieur Giroud," it seemed to Rosalie that the interview had lasted no more than a few minutes. By the time she came out from the confessional, Mass was over. Albert had left the church.

"The Vicar-General was right," thought she. "*He* is unhappy. Why should this eagle – for he has the eyes of an eagle – swoop down on Besancon? Oh, I must know everything! But how?"

Under the smart of this new desire Rosalie set the stitches of her worsted-work with exquisite precision, and hid her meditations under a little innocent air, which shammed simplicity to deceive Madame de Watteville.

From that Sunday, when Mademoiselle de Watteville had met that look, or, if you please, received this baptism of fire – a fine expression of Napoleon's which may be well applied to love – she eagerly promoted the plan for the Belvedere.

"Mamma," said she one day when two columns were turned, "my father has taken a singular idea into his head; he is turning columns for a Belvedere he intends to erect on the heap of stones in the middle of the garden. Do you approve of it? It seems to me – "

"I approve of everything your father does," said Madame de Watteville drily, "and it is a wife's duty to submit to her husband even if she does not approve of his ideas. Why should I object to a thing which is of no importance in itself, if only it amuses Monsieur de Watteville?"

"Well, because from thence we shall see into Monsieur de Soulas' rooms, and Monsieur de Soulas will see us when we are there. Perhaps remarks may be made – "

"Do you presume, Rosalie, to guide your parents, and think you know more than they do of life and the proprieties?"

"I say no more, mamma. Besides, my father said that there would be a room in the grotto, where it would be cool, and where we can take coffee."

"Your father has had an excellent idea," said Madame de Watteville, who forthwith went to look at the columns.

She gave her entire approbation to the Baron de Watteville's design, while choosing for the erection of this monument a spot at the bottom of the garden, which could not be seen from Monsieur de Soulas' windows, but whence they could perfectly see into Albert Savaron's rooms. A builder was sent for, who undertook to construct a grotto, of which the top should be reached by a path

three feet wide through the rock-work, where periwinkles would grow, iris, clematis, ivy, honeysuckle, and Virginia creeper. The Baroness desired that the inside should be lined with rustic wood-work, such as was then the fashion for flower-stands, with a looking-glass against the wall, an ottoman forming a box, and a table of inlaid bark. Monsieur de Soulas proposed that the floor should be of asphalt. Rosalie suggested a hanging chandelier of rustic wood.

"The Watteville are having something charming done in their garden," was rumored in Besancon.

"They are rich, and can afford a thousand crowns for a whim _ "

"A thousand crowns!" exclaimed Madame de Chavoncourt.

"Yes, a thousand crowns," cried young Monsieur de Soulas. "A man has been sent for from Paris to rusticate the interior but it will be very pretty. Monsieur de Watteville himself is making the chandelier, and has begun to carve the wood."

"Berquet is to make a cellar under it," said an Abbe.

"No," replied young Monsieur de Soulas, "he is raising the kiosk on a concrete foundation, that it may not be damp."

"You know the very least things that are done in that house," said Madame de Chavoncourt sourly, as she looked at one of her great girls waiting to be married for a year past.

Mademoiselle de Watteville, with a little flush of pride in thinking of the success of her Belvedere, discerned in herself a vast superiority over every one about her. No one guessed that a

little girl, supposed to be a witless goose, had simply made up her mind to get a closer view of the lawyer Savaron's private study.

Albert Savaron's brilliant defence of the Cathedral Chapter was all the sooner forgotten because the envy of the other lawyers was aroused. Also, Savaron, faithful to his seclusion, went nowhere. Having no friends to cry him up, and seeing no one, he increased the chances of being forgotten which are common to strangers in Besancon. Nevertheless, he pleaded three times at the Commercial Tribunal in three knotty cases which had to be carried to the superior Court. He thus gained as clients four of the chief merchants of the place, who discerned in him so much good sense and sound legal purview that they placed their claims in his hands.

On the day when the Watteville family inaugurated the Belvedere, Savaron also was founding a monument. Thanks to the connections he had obscurely formed among the upper class of merchants in Besancon, he was starting a fortnightly paper, called the *Eastern Review*, with the help of forty shares of five hundred francs each, taken up by his first ten clients, on whom he had impressed the necessity for promoting the interests of Besancon, the town where the traffic should meet between Mulhouse and Lyons, and the chief centre between Mulhouse and Rhone.

To compete with Strasbourg, was it not needful that Besancon should become a focus of enlightenment as well as of trade? The leading questions relating to the interests of Eastern France

could only be dealt with in a review. What a glorious task to rob Strasbourg and Dijon of their literary importance, to bring light to the East of France, and compete with the centralizing influence of Paris! These reflections, put forward by Albert, were repeated by the ten merchants, who believed them to be their own.

Monsieur Savaron did not commit the blunder of putting his name in front; he left the finance of the concern to his chief client, Monsieur Boucher, connected by marriage with one of the great publishers of important ecclesiastical works; but he kept the editorship, with a share of the profits as founder. The commercial interest appealed to Dole, to Dijon, to Salins, to Neufchatel, to the Jura, Bourg, Nantua, Lous-le-Saulnier. The concurrence was invited of the learning and energy of every scientific student in the districts of le Bugey, la Bresse, and Franche Comte. By the influence of commercial interests and common feeling, five hundred subscribers were booked in consideration of the low price; the *Review* cost eight francs a quarter.

To avoid hurting the conceit of the provincials by refusing their articles, the lawyer hit on the good idea of suggesting a desire for the literary management of this *Review* to Monsieur Boucher's eldest son, a young man of two-and-twenty, very eager for fame, to whom the snares and woes of literary responsibilities were utterly unknown. Albert quietly kept the upper hand and made Alfred Boucher his devoted adherent. Alfred was the only man in Besancon with whom the king of the bar was on familiar

terms. Alfred came in the morning to discuss the articles for the next number with Albert in the garden. It is needless to say that the trial number contained a "Meditation" by Alfred, which Savaron approved. In his conversations with Alfred, Albert would let drop some great ideas, subjects for articles of which Alfred availed himself. And thus the merchant's son fancied he was making capital out of the great man. To Alfred, Albert was a man of genius, of profound politics. The commercial world, enchanted at the success of the *Review*, had to pay up only three-tenths of their shares. Two hundred more subscribers, and the periodical would pay a dividend to the share-holders of five per cent, the editor remaining unpaid. This editing, indeed, was beyond price.

After the third number the *Review* was recognized for exchange by all the papers published in France, which Albert henceforth read at home. This third number included a tale signed "A. S.," and attributed to the famous lawyer. In spite of the small attention paid by the higher circle of Besancon to the *Review* which was accused of Liberal views, this, the first novel produced in the county, came under discussion that mid-winter at Madame de Chavoncourt's.

"Papa," said Rosalie, "a *Review* is published in Besancon; you ought to take it in; and keep it in your room, for mamma would not let me read it, but you will lend it to me."

Monsieur de Watteville, eager to obey his dear Rosalie, who for the last five months had given him so many proofs of filial

affection, – Monsieur de Watteville went in person to subscribe for a year to the *Eastern Review*, and lent the four numbers already out to his daughter. In the course of the night Rosalie devoured the tale – the first she had ever read in her life – but she had only known life for two months past. Hence the effect produced on her by this work must not be judged by ordinary rules. Without prejudice of any kind as to the greater or less merit of this composition from the pen of a Parisian who had thus imported into the province the manner, the brilliancy, if you will, of the new literary school, it could not fail to be a masterpiece to a young girl abandoning all her intelligence and her innocent heart to her first reading of this kind.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.