

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF
MARRIAGE, COMPLETE

Оноре де Бальзак

The Physiology of Marriage, Complete

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де Бальзак О.

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Honoré de Balzac

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INTRODUCTION

“Marriage is not an institution of nature. The family in the east is entirely different from the family in the west. Man is the servant of nature, and the institutions of society are grafts, not spontaneous growths of nature. Laws are made to suit manners, and manners vary.

“Marriage must therefore undergo the gradual development towards perfection to which all human affairs submit.”

These words, pronounced in the presence of the Conseil d’Etat by Napoleon during the discussion of the civil code, produced a profound impression upon the author of this book; and perhaps unconsciously he received the suggestion of this work, which he now presents to the public. And indeed at the period during which, while still in his youth, he studied French law, the word ADULTERY made a singular impression upon him. Taking, as it did, a prominent place in the code, this word never occurred to his mind without conjuring up its mournful train of consequences. Tears, shame, hatred, terror, secret crime, bloody wars, families without a head, and social misery rose like a sudden line of phantoms before him when he read the solemn word ADULTERY! Later on, when he became acquainted with the most cultivated circles of society, the author perceived that the rigor of marriage laws was very generally modified by adultery. He found that the number of unhappy homes was larger than that of happy marriages. In fact, he was the first to notice that of all human sciences that which relates to marriage was the least progressive. But this was the observation of a young man; and with him, as with so many others, this thought, like a pebble flung into the bosom of a lake, was lost in the abyss of his tumultuous thoughts. Nevertheless, in spite of himself the author was compelled to investigate, and eventually there was gathered within his mind, little by little, a swarm of conclusions, more or less just, on the subject of married life. Works like the present one are formed in the mind of the author with as much mystery as that with which truffles grow on the scented plains of Perigord. Out of the primitive and holy horror which adultery caused him and the investigation which he had thoughtlessly made, there was born one morning a trifling thought in which his ideas were formulated. This thought was really a satire upon marriage. It was as follows: A husband and wife found themselves in love with each other for the first time after twenty-seven years of marriage.

He amused himself with this little axiom and passed a whole week in delight, grouping around this harmless epigram the crowd of ideas which came to him unconsciously and which he was astonished to find that he possessed. His humorous mood yielded at last to the claims of serious investigation. Willing as he was to take a hint, the author returned to his habitual idleness. Nevertheless, this slight germ of science and of joke grew to perfection, unfostered, in the fields of thought. Each phase of the work which had been condemned by others took root and gathered strength, surviving like the slight branch of a tree which, flung upon the sand by a winter’s storm, finds itself covered at morning with white and fantastic icicles, produced by the caprices of nightly frosts. So the sketch lived on and became the starting point of myriad branching moralizations. It was like a polypus which multiplies itself by generation. The feelings of youth, the observations which a favorable opportunity led him to make, were verified in the most trifling events of his after life. Soon this mass of ideas became harmonized, took life, seemed, as it were, to become a living individual and moved in the midst of those domains of fancy, where the soul loves to give full rein to its wild creations. Amid all the distractions of the world and of life, the author always heard a voice ringing in his ears and mockingly revealing the secrets of things at the very moment he was watching a woman as she danced, smiled, or talked. Just as Mephistopheles pointed out to Faust in that terrific assemblage

at the Brocken, faces full of frightful augury, so the author was conscious in the midst of the ball of a demon who would strike him on the shoulder with a familiar air and say to him: “Do you notice that enchanting smile? It is a grin of hatred.” And then the demon would strut about like one of the captains in the old comedies of Hardy. He would twitch the folds of a lace mantle and endeavor to make new the fretted tinsel and spangles of its former glory. And then like Rabelais he would burst into loud and unrestrainable laughter, and would trace on the street-wall a word which might serve as a pendant to the “Drink!” which was the only oracle obtainable from the heavenly bottle. This literary Trilby would often appear seated on piles of books, and with hooked fingers would point out with a grin of malice two yellow volumes whose title dazzled the eyes. Then when he saw he had attracted the author’s attention he spelt out, in a voice alluring as the tones of an harmonica, *Physiology of Marriage!* But, almost always he appeared at night during my dreams, gentle as some fairy guardian; he tried by words of sweetness to subdue the soul which he would appropriate to himself. While he attracted, he also scoffed at me; supple as a woman’s mind, cruel as a tiger, his friendliness was more formidable than his hatred, for he never yielded a caress without also inflicting a wound. One night in particular he exhausted the resources of his sorceries, and crowned all by a last effort. He came, he sat on the edge of the bed like a young maiden full of love, who at first keeps silence but whose eyes sparkle, until at last her secret escapes her.

“This,” said he, “is a prospectus of a new life-buoy, by means of which one can pass over the Seine dry-footed. This other pamphlet is the report of the Institute on a garment by wearing which we can pass through flames without being burnt. Have you no scheme which can preserve marriage from the miseries of excessive cold and excessive heat? Listen to me! Here we have a book on the *Art* of preserving foods; on the *Art* of curing smoky chimneys; on the *Art* of making good mortar; on the *Art* of tying a cravat; on the *Art* of carving meat.”

In a moment he had named such a prodigious number of books that the author felt his head go round.

“These myriads of books,” says he, “have been devoured by readers; and while everybody does not build a house, and some grow hungry, and others have no cravat, or no fire to warm themselves at, yet everybody to some degree is married. But come look yonder.”

He waved his hand, and appeared to bring before me a distant ocean where all the books of the world were tossing up and down like agitated waves. The octodecimos bounded over the surface of the water. The octavos as they were flung on their way uttered a solemn sound, sank to the bottom, and only rose up again with great difficulty, hindered as they were by duodecimos and works of smaller bulk which floated on the top and melted into light foam. The furious billows were crowded with journalists, proof-readers, paper-makers, apprentices, printers’ agents, whose hands alone were seen mingled in the confusion among the books. Millions of voices rang in the air, like those of schoolboys bathing. Certain men were seen moving hither and thither in canoes, engaged in fishing out the books, and landing them on the shore in the presence of a tall man, of a disdainful air, dressed in black, and of a cold, unsympathetic expression. The whole scene represented the libraries and the public. The demon pointed out with his finger a skiff freshly decked out with all sails set and instead of a flag bearing a placard. Then with a peal of sardonic laughter, he read with a thundering voice: *Physiology of Marriage.*

The author fell in love, the devil left him in peace, for he would have undertaken more than he could handle if he had entered an apartment occupied by a woman. Several years passed without bringing other torments than those of love, and the author was inclined to believe that he had been healed of one infirmity by means of another which took its place. But one evening he found himself in a Parisian drawing-room where one of the men among the circle who stood round the fireplace began the conversation by relating in a sepulchral voice the following anecdote:

A peculiar thing took place at Ghent while I was staying there. A lady ten years a widow lay on her bed attacked by mortal sickness. The three heirs of collateral lineage were waiting for her

last sigh. They did not leave her side for fear that she would make a will in favor of the convent of Beguins belonging to the town. The sick woman kept silent, she seemed dozing and death appeared to overspread very gradually her mute and livid face. Can't you imagine those three relations seated in silence through that winter midnight beside her bed? An old nurse is with them and she shakes her head, and the doctor sees with anxiety that the sickness has reached its last stage, and holds his hat in one hand and with the other makes a sign to the relations, as if to say to them: "I have no more visits to make here." Amid the solemn silence of the room is heard the dull rustling of a snow-storm which beats upon the shutters. For fear that the eyes of the dying woman might be dazzled by the light, the youngest of the heirs had fitted a shade to the candle which stood near that bed so that the circle of light scarcely reached the pillow of the deathbed, from which the sallow countenance of the sick woman stood out like a figure of Christ imperfectly gilded and fixed upon a cross of tarnished silver. The flickering rays shed by the blue flames of a crackling fire were therefore the sole light of this sombre chamber, where the denouement of a drama was just ending. A log suddenly rolled from the fire onto the floor, as if presaging some catastrophe. At the sound of it the sick woman quickly rose to a sitting posture. She opened two eyes, clear as those of a cat, and all present eyed her in astonishment. She saw the log advance, and before any one could check an unexpected movement which seemed prompted by a kind of delirium, she bounded from her bed, seized the tongs and threw the coal back into the fireplace. The nurse, the doctor, the relations rushed to her assistance; they took the dying woman in their arms. They put her back in bed; she laid her head upon her pillow and after a few minutes died, keeping her eyes fixed even after her death upon that plank in the floor which the burning brand had touched. Scarcely had the Countess Van Ostroem expired when the three co-heirs exchanged looks of suspicion, and thinking no more about their aunt, began to examine the mysterious floor. As they were Belgians their calculations were as rapid as their glances. An agreement was made by three words uttered in a low voice that none of them should leave the chamber. A servant was sent to fetch a carpenter. Their collateral hearts beat excitedly as they gathered round the treasured flooring, and watched their young apprentice giving the first blow with his chisel. The plank was cut through.

"My aunt made a sign," said the youngest of the heirs.

"No; it was merely the quivering light that made it appear so," replied the eldest, who kept one eye on the treasure and the other on the corpse.

The afflicted relations discovered exactly on the spot where the brand had fallen a certain object artistically enveloped in a mass of plaster.

"Proceed," said the eldest of the heirs.

The chisel of the apprentice then brought to light a human head and some odds and ends of clothing, from which they recognized the count whom all the town believed to have died at Java, and whose loss had been bitterly deplored by his wife.

The narrator of this old story was a tall spare man, with light eyes and brown hair, and the author thought he saw in him a vague resemblance to the demon who had before this tormented him; but the stranger did not show the cloven foot. Suddenly the word ADULTERY sounded in the ears of the author; and this word woke up in his imagination the most mournful countenances of that procession which before this had streamed by on the utterance of the magic syllables. From that evening he was haunted and persecuted by dreams of a work which did not yet exist; and at no period of his life was the author assailed with such delusive notions about the fatal subject of this book. But he bravely resisted the fiend, although the latter referred the most unimportant incidents of life to this unknown work, and like a customhouse officer set his stamp of mockery upon every occurrence.

Some days afterwards the author found himself in the company of two ladies. The first of them had been one of the most refined and the most intellectual women of Napoleon's court. In his day she occupied a lofty position, but the sudden appearance of the Restoration caused her downfall; she became a recluse. The second, who was young and beautiful, was at that time living at Paris the life

of a fashionable woman. They were friends, because, the one being forty and the other twenty-two years old, they were seldom rivals on the same field. The author was considered quite insignificant by the first of the two ladies, and since the other soon discovered this, they carried on in his presence the conversation which they had begun in a frank discussion of a woman's lot.

"Have you noticed, dear, that women in general bestow their love only upon a fool?"

"What do you mean by that, duchess? And how can you make your remark fit in with the fact that they have an aversion for their husbands?"

"These women are absolute tyrants!" said the author to himself. "Has the devil again turned up in a mob cap?"

"No, dear, I am not joking," replied the duchess, "and I shudder with fear for myself when I coolly consider people whom I have known in other times. Wit always has a sparkle which wounds us, and the man who has much of it makes us fear him perhaps, and if he is a proud man he will be capable of jealousy, and is not therefore to our taste. In fact, we prefer to raise a man to our own height rather than to have to climb up to his. Talent has great successes for us to share in, but the fool affords enjoyment to us; and we would sooner hear said 'that is a very handsome man' than to see our lover elected to the Institute."

"That's enough, duchess! You have absolutely startled me."

And the young coquette began to describe the lovers about whom all the women of her acquaintance raved; there was not a single man of intellect among them.

"But I swear by my virtue," she said, "their husbands are worth more."

"But these are the sort of people they choose for husbands," the duchess answered gravely.

"Tell me," asked the author, "is the disaster which threatens the husband in France quite inevitable?"

"It is," replied the duchess, with a smile; "and the rage which certain women breathe out against those of their sex, whose unfortunate happiness it is to entertain a passion, proves what a burden to them is their chastity. If it were not for fear of the devil, one would be Lais; another owes her virtue to the dryness of her selfish heart; a third to the silly behaviour of her first lover; another still –"

The author checked this outpour of revelation by confiding to the two ladies his design for the work with which he had been haunted; they smiled and promised him their assistance. The youngest, with an air of gaiety suggested one of the first chapters of the undertaking, by saying that she would take upon herself to prove mathematically that women who are entirely virtuous were creatures of reason.

When the author got home he said at once to his demon:

"Come! I am ready; let us sign the compact."

But the demon never returned.

If the author has written here the biography of his book he has not acted on the prompting of fatuity. He relates facts which may furnish material for the history of human thought, and will without doubt explain the work itself. It may perhaps be important to certain anatomists of thought to be told that the soul is feminine. Thus although the author made a resolution not to think about the book which he was forced to write, the book, nevertheless, was completed. One page of it was found on the bed of a sick man, another on the sofa of a boudoir. The glances of women when they turned in the mazes of a waltz flung to him some thoughts; a gesture or a word filled his disdainful brain with others. On the day when he said to himself, "This work, which haunts me, shall be achieved," everything vanished; and like the three Belgians, he drew forth a skeleton from the place over which he had bent to seize a treasure.

A mild, pale countenance took the place of the demon who had tempted me; it wore an engaging expression of kindness; there were no sharp pointed arrows of criticism in its lineaments. It seemed to deal more with words than with ideas, and shrank from noise and clamor. It was perhaps the household genius of the honorable deputies who sit in the centre of the Chamber.

“Wouldn’t it be better,” it said, “to let things be as they are? Are things so bad? We ought to believe in marriage as we believe in the immortality of the soul; and you are certainly not making a book to advertise the happiness of marriage. You will surely conclude that among a million of Parisian homes happiness is the exception. You will find perhaps that there are many husbands disposed to abandon their wives to you; but there is not a single son who will abandon his mother. Certain people who are hit by the views which you put forth will suspect your morals and will misrepresent your intentions. In a word, in order to handle social sores, one ought to be a king, or a first consul at least.”

Reason, although it appeared under a form most pleasing to the author, was not listened to; for in the distance Folly tossed the coxcomb of Panurge, and the author wished to seize it; but, when he tried to catch it, he found that it was as heavy as the club of Hercules. Moreover, the cure of Meudon adorned it in such fashion that a young man who was less pleased with producing a good work than with wearing fine gloves could not even touch it.

“Is our work completed?” asked the younger of the two feminine assistants of the author.

“Alas! madame,” I said, “will you ever requite me for all the hatreds which that work will array against me?”

She waved her hand, and then the author replied to her doubt by a look of indifference.

“What do you mean? Would you hesitate? You must publish it without fear. In the present day we accept a book more because it is in fashion than because it has anything in it.”

Although the author does not here represent himself as anything more than the secretary of two ladies, he has in compiling their observations accomplished a double task. With regard to marriage he has here arranged matters which represent what everybody thinks but no one dares to say; but has he not also exposed himself to public displeasure by expressing the mind of the public? Perhaps, however, the eclecticism of the present essay will save it from condemnation. All the while that he indulges in banter the author has attempted to popularize certain ideas which are particularly consoling. He has almost always endeavored to lay bare the hidden springs which move the human soul. While undertaking to defend the most material interests of man, judging them or condemning them, he will perhaps bring to light many sources of intellectual delight. But the author does not foolishly claim always to put forth his pleasantries in the best of taste; he has merely counted upon the diversity of intellectual pursuits in expectation of receiving as much blame as approbation. The subject of his work was so serious that he is constantly launched into anecdote; because at the present day anecdotes are the vehicle of all moral teaching, and the anti-narcotic of every work of literature. In literature, analysis and investigation prevail, and the wearying of the reader increases in proportion with the egotism of the writer. This is one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall a book, and the present author has been quite aware of it. He has therefore so arranged the topics of this long essay as to afford resting places for the reader. This method has been successfully adopted by a writer, who produced on the subject of Taste a work somewhat parallel to that which is here put forth on the subject of Marriage. From the former the present writer may be permitted to borrow a few words in order to express a thought which he shares with the author of them. This quotation will serve as an expression of homage to his predecessor, whose success has been so swiftly followed by his death:

“When I write and speak of myself in the singular, this implies a confidential talk with the reader; he can examine the statement, discuss it, doubt and even ridicule it; but when I arm myself with the formidable WE, I become the professor and demand submission.” – Brillat-Savarin, Preface to the *Physiology of Taste*.

DECEMBER 5, 1829

FIRST PART. A GENERAL CONSIDERATION

We will declaim against stupid laws until they are changed, and in the meantime blindly submit to them. – Diderot, *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville*.

MEDITATION I. THE SUBJECT

Physiology, what must I consider your meaning?

Is not your object to prove that marriage unites for life two beings who do not know each other?

That life consists in passion, and that no passion survives marriage?

That marriage is an institution necessary for the preservation of society, but that it is contrary to the laws of nature?

That divorce, this admirable release from the misfortunes of marriage, should with one voice be reinstated?

That, in spite of all its inconveniences, marriage is the foundation on which property is based?

That it furnishes invaluable pledges for the security of government?

That there is something touching in the association of two human beings for the purpose of supporting the pains of life?

That there is something ridiculous in the wish that one and the same thoughts should control two wills?

That the wife is treated as a slave?

That there has never been a marriage entirely happy?

That marriage is filled with crimes and that the known murders are not the worst?

That fidelity is impossible, at least to the man?

That an investigation if it could be undertaken would prove that in the transmission of patrimonial property there was more risk than security?

That adultery does more harm than marriage does good?

That infidelity in a woman may be traced back to the earliest ages of society, and that marriage still survives this perpetuation of treachery?

That the laws of love so strongly link together two human beings that no human law can put them asunder?

That while there are marriages recorded on the public registers, there are others over which nature herself has presided, and they have been dictated either by the mutual memory of thought, or by an utter difference of mental disposition, or by corporeal affinity in the parties named; that it is thus that heaven and earth are constantly at variance?

That there are many husbands fine in figure and of superior intellect whose wives have lovers exceedingly ugly, insignificant in appearance or stupid in mind?

All these questions furnish material for books; but the books have been written and the questions are constantly reappearing.

Physiology, what must I take you to mean?

Do you reveal new principles? Would you pretend that it is the right thing that woman should be made common? Lycurgus and certain Greek peoples as well as Tartars and savages have tried this.

Can it possibly be right to confine women? The Ottomans once did so, and nowadays they give them their liberty.

Would it be right to marry young women without providing a dowry and yet exclude them from the right of succeeding to property? Some English authors and some moralists have proved that this with the admission of divorce is the surest method of rendering marriage happy.

Should there be a little Hagar in each marriage establishment? There is no need to pass a law for that. The provision of the code which makes an unfaithful wife liable to a penalty in whatever place the crime be committed, and that other article which does not punish the erring husband unless his concubine dwells beneath the conjugal roof, implicitly admits the existence of mistresses in the city.

Sanchez has written a dissertation on the penal cases incident to marriage; he has even argued on the illegitimacy and the opportuneness of each form of indulgence; he has outlined all the duties, moral, religious and corporeal, of the married couple; in short his work would form twelve volumes in octavo if the huge folio entitled *De Matrimonio* were thus represented.

Clouds of lawyers have flung clouds of treatises over the legal difficulties which are born of marriage. There exist several works on the judicial investigation of impotency.

Legions of doctors have marshaled their legions of books on the subject of marriage in its relation to medicine and surgery.

In the nineteenth century the *Physiology of Marriage* is either an insignificant compilation or the work of a fool written for other fools; old priests have taken their balances of gold and have weighed the most trifling scruples of the marriage consciences; old lawyers have put on their spectacles and have distinguished between every kind of married transgression; old doctors have seized the scalpel and drawn it over all the wounds of the subject; old judges have mounted to the bench and have decided all the cases of marriage dissolution; whole generations have passed unuttered cries of joy or of grief on the subject, each age has cast its vote into the urn; the Holy Spirit, poets and writers have recounted everything from the days of Eve to the Trojan war, from Helen to Madame de Maintenon, from the mistress of Louis XIV to the woman of their own day.

Physiology, what must I consider your meaning?

Shall I say that you intend to publish pictures more or less skillfully drawn, for the purpose of convincing us that a man marries:

From ambition – that is well known;

From kindness, in order to deliver a girl from the tyranny of her mother;

From rage, in order to disinherit his relations;

From scorn of a faithless mistress;

From weariness of a pleasant bachelor life;

From folly, for each man always commits one;

In consequence of a wager, which was the case with Lord Byron;

From interest, which is almost always the case;

From youthfulness on leaving college, like a blockhead;

From ugliness, – fear of some day failing to secure a wife;

Through Machiavelism, in order to be the heir of some old woman at an early date;

From necessity, in order to secure the standing to *our* son;

From obligation, the damsel having shown herself weak;

From passion, in order to become more surely cured of it;

On account of a quarrel, in order to put an end to a lawsuit;

From gratitude, by which he gives more than he has received;

From goodness, which is the fate of doctrinaires;

From the condition of a will when a dead uncle attaches his legacy to some girl, marriage with whom is the condition of succession;

From custom, in imitation of his ancestors;

From old age, in order to make an end of life;

From *yatidi*, that is the hour of going to bed and signifies amongst the Turks all bodily needs;

From religious zeal, like the Duke of Saint-Aignan, who did not wish to commit sin?¹

But these incidents of marriage have furnished matter for thirty thousand comedies and a hundred thousand romances.

Physiology, for the third and last time I ask you – What is your meaning?

¹ The foregoing queries came in (untranslatable) alphabetic order in the original. – Editor

So far everything is commonplace as the pavement of the street, familiar as a crossway. Marriage is better known than the Barabbas of the Passion. All the ancient ideas which it calls to light permeate literature since the world is the world, and there is not a single opinion which might serve to the advantage of the world, nor a ridiculous project which could not find an author to write it up, a printer to print it, a bookseller to sell it and a reader to read it.

Allow me to say to you like Rabelais, who is in every sense our master:

“Gentlemen, God save and guard you! Where are you? I cannot see you; wait until I put on my spectacles. Ah! I see you now; you, your wives, your children. Are you in good health? I am glad to hear it.”

But it is not for you that I am writing. Since you have grown-up children that ends the matter.

Ah! it is you, illustrious tipplers, pampered and gouty, and you, tireless pie-cutters, favorites who come dear; day-long pantagruellists who keep your private birds, gay and gallant, and who go to tierce, to sexts, to nones, and also to vespers and compline and never tire of going.

It is not for you that the *Physiology of Marriage* is addressed, for you are not married and may you never be married. You herd of bigots, snails, hypocrites, dotards, lechers, booted for pilgrimage to Rome, disguised and marked, as it were, to deceive the world. Go back, you scoundrels, out of my sight! Gallows birds are ye all – now in the devil’s name will you not begone? There are none left now but the good souls who love to laugh; not the snivelers who burst into tears in prose or verse, whatever their subject be, who make people sick with their odes, their sonnets, their meditation; none of these dreamers, but certain old-fashioned pantagruellists who don’t think twice about it when they are invited to join a banquet or provoked to make a repartee, who can take pleasure in a book like *Pease and the Lard* with commentary of Rabelais, or in the one entitled *The Dignity of Breeches*, and who esteem highly the fair books of high degree, a quarry hard to run down and redoubtable to wrestle with.

It no longer does to laugh at a government, my friend, since it has invented means to raise fifteen hundred millions by taxation. High ecclesiastics, monks and nuns are no longer so rich that we can drink with them; but let St. Michael come, he who chased the devil from heaven, and we shall perhaps see the good time come back again! There is only one thing in France at the present moment which remains a laughing matter, and that is marriage. Disciples of Panurge, ye are the only readers I desire. You know how seasonably to take up and lay down a book, how to get the most pleasure out of it, to understand the hint in a half word – how to suck nourishment from a marrow-bone.

The men of the microscope who see nothing but a speck, the census-mongers – have they reviewed the whole matter? Have they pronounced without appeal that it is as impossible to write a book on marriage as to make new again a broken pot?

Yes, master fool. If you begin to squeeze the marriage question you squirt out nothing but fun for the bachelors and weariness for the married men. It is everlasting morality. A million printed pages would have no other matter in them.

In spite of this, here is my first proposition: marriage is a fight to the death, before which the wedded couple ask a blessing from heaven, because it is the rashest of all undertakings to swear eternal love; the fight at once commences and victory, that is to say liberty, remains in the hands of the cleverer of the two.

Undoubtedly. But do you see in this a fresh idea?

Well, I address myself to the married men of yesterday and of to-day; to those who on leaving the Church or the registration office indulge the hope of keeping their wives for themselves alone; to those whom some form or other of egotism or some indefinable sentiment induces to say when they see the marital troubles of another, “This will never happen to me.”

I address myself to those sailors who after witnessing the foundering of other ships still put to sea; to those bachelors who after witnessing the shipwreck of virtue in a marriage of another venture upon wedlock. And this is my subject, eternally now, yet eternally old!

A young man, or it may be an old one, in love or not in love, has obtained possession by a contract duly recorded at the registration office in heaven and on the rolls of the nation, of a young girl with long hair, with black liquid eyes, with small feet, with dainty tapering fingers, with red lips, with teeth of ivory, finely formed, trembling with life, tempting and plump, white as a lily, loaded with the most charming wealth of beauty. Her drooping eyelashes seem like the points of the iron crown; her skin, which is as fresh as the calyx of a white camelia, is streaked with the purple of the red camelia; over her virginal complexion one seems to see the bloom of young fruit and the delicate down of a young peach; the azure veins spread a kindling warmth over this transparent surface; she asks for life and she gives it; she is all joy and love, all tenderness and candor; she loves her husband, or at least believes she loves him.

The husband who is in love says in the bottom of his heart: “Those eyes will see no one but me, that mouth will tremble with love for me alone, that gentle hand will lavish the caressing treasures of delight on me alone, that bosom will heave at no voice but mine, that slumbering soul will awake at my will alone; I only will entangle my fingers in those shining tresses; I alone will indulge myself in dreamily caressing that sensitive head. I will make death the guardian of my pillow if only I may ward off from the nuptial couch the stranger who would violate it; that throne of love shall swim in the blood of the rash or of my own. Tranquillity, honor, happiness, the ties of home, the fortune of my children, all are at stake there; I would defend them as a lioness defends her cubs. Woe unto him who shall set foot in my lair!”

Well now, courageous athlete, we applaud your intention. Up to the present moment no geographer has ventured to trace the lines of longitude and latitude in the ocean of marriage. Old husbands have been ashamed to point out the sand banks, the reefs, the shallows, the breakers, the monsoons, the coasts and currents which have wrecked their ships, for their shipwrecks brought them shame. There was no pilot, no compass for those pilgrims of marriage. This work is intended to supply the desideratum.

Without mentioning grocers and drapers, there are so many people occupied in discovering the secret motives of women, that it is really a work of charity to classify for them, by chapter and verse, all the secret situations of marriage; a good table of contents will enable them to put their finger on each movement of their wives’ heart, as a table of logarithms tells them the product of a given multiplication.

And now what do you think about that? Is not this a novel undertaking, and one which no philosopher has as yet approached, I mean this attempt to show how a woman may be prevented from deceiving her husband? Is not this the comedy of comedies? Is it not a second *speculum vitae humanae*. We are not now dealing with the abstract questions which we have done justice to already in this Meditation. At the present day in ethics as in exact science, the world asks for facts for the results of observation. These we shall furnish.

Let us begin then by examining the true condition of things, by analyzing the forces which exist on either side. Before arming our imaginary champion let us reckon up the number of his enemies. Let us count the Cossacks who intend to invade his little domain.

All who wish may embark with us on this voyage, all who can may laugh. Weigh anchor; hoist sail! You know exactly the point from which you start. You have this advantage over a great many books that are written.

As for our fancy of laughing while we weep, and of weeping while we laugh, as the divine Rabelais drank while he ate and ate while he drank; as for our humor, to put Heraclitus and Democritus on the same page and to discard style or premeditated phrase – if any of the crew mutiny, overboard with the doting cranks, the infamous classicists, the dead and buried romanticists, and steer for the blue water!

Everybody perhaps will jeeringly remark that we are like those who say with smiling faces, “I am going to tell you a story that will make you laugh!” But it is the proper thing to joke when

speaking of marriage! In short, can you not understand that we consider marriage as a trifling ailment to which all of us are subject and upon which this volume is a monograph?

“But you, your bark or your work starts off like those postilions who crack their whips because their passengers are English. You will not have galloped at full speed for half a league before you dismount to mend a trace or to breathe your horses. What is the good of blowing the trumpet before victory?”

Ah! my dear pantagruellists, nowadays to claim success is to obtain it, and since, after all, great works are only due to the expansion of little ideas, I do not see why I should not pluck the laurels, if only for the purpose of crowning those dirty bacon faces who join us in swallowing a dram. One moment, pilot, let us not start without making one little definition.

Reader, if from time to time you meet in this work the terms virtue or virtuous, let us understand that virtue means a certain labored facility by which a wife keeps her heart for her husband; at any rate, that the word is not used in a general sense, and I leave this distinction to the natural sagacity of all.

MEDITATION II. MARRIAGE STATISTICS

The administration has been occupied for nearly twenty years in reckoning how many acres of woodland, meadow, vineyard and fallow are comprised in the area of France. It has not stopped there, but has also tried to learn the number and species of the animals to be found there. Scientific men have gone still further; they have reckoned up the cords of wood, the pounds of beef, the apples and eggs consumed in Paris. But no one has yet undertaken either in the name of marital honor or in the interest of marriageable people, or for the advantage of morality and the progress of human institutions, to investigate the number of honest wives. What! the French government, if inquiry is made of it, is able to say how many men it has under arms, how many spies, how many employees, how many scholars; but, when it is asked how many virtuous women, it can answer nothing! If the King of France took into his head to choose his august partner from among his subjects, the administration could not even tell him the number of white lambs from whom he could make his choice. It would be obliged to resort to some competition which awards the rose of good conduct, and that would be a laughable event.

Were the ancients then our masters in political institutions as in morality? History teaches us that Ahasuerus, when he wished to take a wife from among the damsels of Persia, chose Esther, the most virtuous and the most beautiful. His ministers therefore must necessarily have discovered some method of obtaining the cream of the population. Unfortunately the Bible, which is so clear on all matrimonial questions, has omitted to give us a rule for matrimonial choice.

Let us try to supply this gap in the work of the administration by calculating the sum of the female sex in France. Here we call the attention of all friends to public morality, and we appoint them judges of our method of procedure. We shall attempt to be particularly liberal in our estimations, particularly exact in our reasoning, in order that every one may accept the result of this analysis.

The inhabitants of France are generally reckoned at thirty millions.

Certain naturalists think that the number of women exceeds that of men; but as many statisticians are of the opposite opinion, we will make the most probable calculation by allowing fifteen millions for the women.

We will begin by cutting down this sum by nine millions, which stands for those who seem to have some resemblance to women, but whom we are compelled to reject upon serious considerations.

Let us explain:

Naturalists consider man to be no more than a unique species of the order *bimana*, established by Dumeril in his *Analytic Zoology*, page 16; and Bory de Saint Vincent thinks that the ourang-outang ought to be included in the same order if we would make the species complete.

If these zoologists see in us nothing more than a mammal with thirty-two vertebrae possessing the hyoid bone and more folds in the hemispheres of the brain than any other animal; if in their opinion no other differences exist in this order than those produced by the influence of climate, on which are founded the nomenclature of fifteen species whose scientific names it is needless to cite, the physiologists ought also to have the right of making species and sub-species in accordance with definite degrees of intelligence and definite conditions of existence, oral and pecuniary.

Now the nine millions of human creatures which we here refer to present at first sight all the attributes of the human race; they have the hyoid bone, the coracoid process, the acromion, the zygomatic arch. It is therefore permitted for the gentlemen of the Jardin des Plantes to classify them with the *bimana*; but our Physiology will never admit that women are to be found among them. In our view, and in the view of those for whom this book is intended, a woman is a rare variety of the human race, and her principal characteristics are due to the special care men have bestowed upon its cultivation, – thanks to the power of money and the moral fervor of civilization! She is generally recognized by the whiteness, the fineness and softness of her skin. Her taste inclines to

the most spotless cleanliness. Her fingers shrink from encountering anything but objects which are soft, yielding and scented. Like the ermine she sometimes dies for grief on seeing her white tunic soiled. She loves to twine her tresses and to make them exhale the most attractive scents; to brush her rosy nails, to trim them to an almond shape, and frequently to bathe her delicate limbs. She is not satisfied to spend the night excepting on the softest down, and excepting on hair-cushioned lounges, she loves best to take a horizontal position. Her voice is of penetrating sweetness; her movements are full of grace. She speaks with marvelous fluency. She does not apply herself to any hard work; and, nevertheless, in spite of her apparent weakness, there are burdens which she can bear and move with miraculous ease. She avoids the open sunlight and wards it off by ingenious appliances. For her to walk is exhausting. Does she eat? This is a mystery. Has she the needs of other species? It is a problem. Although she is curious to excess she allows herself easily to be caught by any one who can conceal from her the slightest thing, and her intellect leads her to seek incessantly after the unknown. Love is her religion; she thinks how to please the one she loves. To be beloved is the end of all her actions; to excite desire is the motive of every gesture. She dreams of nothing excepting how she may shine, and moves only in a circle filled with grace and elegance. It is for her the Indian girl has spun the soft fleece of Thibet goats, Tarare weaves its airy veils, Brussels sets in motion those shuttles which speed the flaxen thread that is purest and most fine, Bidjapour wrenches from the bowels of the earth its sparkling pebbles, and the Sevres gilds its snow-white clay. Night and day she reflects upon new costumes and spends her life in considering dress and in plaiting her apparel. She moves about exhibiting her brightness and freshness to people she does not know, but whose homage flatters her, while the desire she excites charms her, though she is indifferent to those who feel it. During the hours which she spends in private, in pleasure, and in the care of her person, she amuses herself by caroling the sweetest strains. For her France and Italy ordain delightful concerts and Naples imparts to the strings of the violin an harmonious soul. This species is in fine at once the queen of the world and the slave of passion. She dreads marriage because it ends by spoiling her figure, but she surrenders herself to it because it promises happiness. If she bears children it is by pure chance, and when they are grown up she tries to conceal them.

These characteristics taken at random from among a thousand others are not found amongst those beings whose hands are as black as those of apes and their skin tanned like the ancient parchments of an *olim*; whose complexion is burnt brown by the sun and whose neck is wrinkled like that of a turkey; who are covered with rags; whose voice is hoarse; whose intelligence is nil; who think of nothing but the bread box, and who are incessantly bowed in toil towards the ground; who dig; who harrow; who make hay, glean, gather in the harvest, knead the bread and strip hemp; who, huddled among domestic beasts, infants and men, dwell in holes and dens scarcely covered with thatch; to whom it is of little importance from what source children rain down into their homes. Their work it is to produce many and to deliver them to misery and toil, and if their love is not like their labor in the fields it is at least as much a work of chance.

Alas! if there are throughout the world multitudes of trades-women who sit all day long between the cradle and the sugar-cask, farmers' wives and daughters who milk the cows, unfortunate women who are employed like beasts of burden in the manufactories, who all day long carry the loaded basket, the hoe and the fish-crate, if unfortunately there exist these common human beings to whom the life of the soul, the benefits of education, the delicious tempests of the heart are an unattainable heaven; and if Nature has decreed that they should have coracoid processes and hyoid bones and thirty-two vertebrae, let them remain for the physiologist classed with the ourang-outang. And here we make no stipulations for the leisure class; for those who have the time and the sense to fall in love; for the rich who have purchased the right of indulging their passions; for the intellectual who have conquered a monopoly of fads. Anathema on all those who do not live by thought. We say Raca and fool to all those who are not ardent, young, beautiful and passionate. This is the public expression of that secret sentiment entertained by philanthropists who have learned to read and can keep their own carriage.

Among the nine millions of the proscribed, the tax-gatherer, the magistrate, the law-maker and the priest doubtless see living souls who are to be ruled and made subject to the administration of justice. But the man of sentiment, the philosopher of the boudoir, while he eats his fine bread, made of corn, sown and harvested by these creatures, will reject them and relegate them, as we do, to a place outside the genus Woman. For them, there are no women excepting those who can inspire love; and there is no living being but the creature invested with the priesthood of thought by means of a privileged education, and with whom leisure has developed the power of imagination; in other words that only is a human being whose soul dreams, in love, either of intellectual enjoyments or of physical delights.

We would, however, make the remark that these nine million female pariahs produce here and there a thousand peasant girls who from peculiar circumstances are as fair as Cupids; they come to Paris or to the great cities and end up by attaining the rank of *femmes comme il faut*; but to set off against these two or three thousand favored creatures, there are one hundred thousand others who remain servants or abandon themselves to frightful irregularities. Nevertheless, we are obliged to count these Pompadours of the village among the feminine population.

Our first calculation is based upon the statistical discovery that in France there are eighteen millions of the poor, ten millions of people in easy circumstances and two millions of the rich.

There exist, therefore, in France only six millions of women in whom men of sentiment are now interested, have been interested, or will be interested.

Let us subject this social elite to a philosophic examination.

We think, without fear of being deceived, that married people who have lived twenty years together may sleep in peace without fear of having their love trespassed upon or of incurring the scandal of a lawsuit for criminal conversation.

From these six millions of individuals we must subtract about two millions of women who are extremely attractive, because for the last forty years they have seen the world; but since they have not the power to make any one fall in love with them, they are on the outside of the discussion now before us. If they are unhappy enough to receive no attention for the sake of amiability, they are soon seized with ennui; they fall back upon religion, upon the cultivation of pets, cats, lap-dogs, and other fancies which are no more offensive than their devoutness.

The calculations made at the Bureau of Longitudes concerning population authorize us again to subtract from the total mentioned two millions of young girls, pretty enough to kill; they are at present in the A B C of life and innocently play with other children, without dreading that these little hobbledoys, who now make them laugh, will one day make them weep.

Again, of the two millions of the remaining women, what reasonable man would not throw out a hundred thousand poor girls, humpbacked, plain, cross-grained, rickety, sickly, blind, crippled in some way, well educated but penniless, all bound to be spinsters, and by no means tempted to violate the sacred laws of marriage?

Nor must we retain the one hundred thousand other girls who become sisters of St. Camille, Sisters of Charity, monastics, teachers, ladies' companions, etc. And we must put into this blessed company a number of young people difficult to estimate, who are too grown up to play with little boys and yet too young to sport their wreath of orange blossoms.

Finally, of the fifteen million subjects which remain at the bottom of our crucible we must eliminate five hundred thousand other individuals, to be reckoned as daughters of Baal, who subserve the appetites of the base. We must even comprise among those, without fear that they will be corrupted by their company, the kept women, the milliners, the shop girls, saleswomen, actresses, singers, the girls of the opera, the ballet-dancers, upper servants, chambermaids, etc. Most of these creatures excite the passions of many people, but they would consider it immodest to inform a lawyer, a mayor, an ecclesiastic or a laughing world of the day and hour when they surrendered to a lover. Their system, justly blamed by an inquisitive world, has the advantage of laying upon them no obligations towards men in general, towards the mayor or the magistracy. As these women do

not violate any oath made in public, they have no connection whatever with a work which treats exclusively of lawful marriage.

Some one will say that the claims made by this essay are very slight, but its limitations make just compensation for those which amateurs consider excessively padded. If any one, through love for a wealthy dowager, wishes to obtain admittance for her into the remaining million, he must classify her under the head of Sisters of Charity, ballet-dancers, or hunchbacks; in fact we have not taken more than five hundred thousand individuals in forming this last class, because it often happens, as we have seen above, that the nine millions of peasant girls make a large accession to it. We have for the same reason omitted the working-girl class and the hucksters; the women of these two sections are the product of efforts made by nine millions of female bimana to rise to the higher civilization. But for its scrupulous exactitude many persons might regard this statistical meditation as a mere joke.

We have felt very much inclined to form a small class of a hundred thousand individuals as a crowning cabinet of the species, to serve as a place of shelter for women who have fallen into a middle estate, like widows, for instance; but we have preferred to estimate in round figures.

It would be easy to prove the fairness of our analysis: let one reflection be sufficient.

The life of a woman is divided into three periods, very distinct from each other: the first begins in the cradle and ends on the attainment of a marriageable age; the second embraces the time during which a woman belongs to marriage; the third opens with the critical period, the ending with which nature closes the passions of life. These three spheres of existence, being almost equal in duration, might be employed for the classification into equal groups of a given number of women. Thus in a mass of six millions, omitting fractions, there are about two million girls between one and eighteen, two millions women between eighteen and forty and two millions of old women. The caprices of society have divided the two millions of marriageable women into three main classes, namely: those who remain spinsters for reasons which we have defined; those whose virtue does not reckon in the obtaining of husbands, and the million of women lawfully married, with whom we have to deal.

You see then, by the exact sifting out of the feminine population, that there exists in France a little flock of barely a million white lambs, a privileged fold into which every wolf is anxious to enter.

Let us put this million of women, already winnowed by our fan, through another examination.

To arrive at the true idea of the degree of confidence which a man ought to have in his wife, let us suppose for a moment that all wives will deceive their husbands.

On this hypothesis, it will be proper to cut out about one-twentieth, viz., young people who are newly married and who will be faithful to their vows for a certain time.

Another twentieth will be in ill-health. This will be to make a very modest allowance for human infirmities.

Certain passions, which we are told destroy the dominion of the man over the heart of his wife, namely, aversion, grief, the bearing of children, will account for another twentieth.

Adultery does not establish itself in the heart of a married woman with the promptness of a pistol-shot. Even when sympathy with another rouses feelings on first sight, a struggle always takes place, whose duration discounts the total sum of conjugal infidelities. It would be an insult to French modesty not to admit the duration of this struggle in a country so naturally combative, without referring to at least a twentieth in the total of married women; but then we will suppose that there are certain sickly women who preserve their lovers while they are using soothing draughts, and that there are certain wives whose confinement makes sarcastic celibates smile. In this way we shall vindicate the modesty of those who enter upon the struggle from motives of virtue. For the same reason we should not venture to believe that a woman forsaken by her lover will find a new one on the spot; but this discount being much more uncertain than the preceding one, we will estimate it at one-fortieth.

These several rebates will reduce our sum total to eight hundred thousand women, when we come to calculate the number of those who are likely to violate married faith. Who would not at the present moment wish to retain the persuasion that wives are virtuous? Are they not the supreme

flower of the country? Are they not all blooming creatures, fascinating the world by their beauty, their youth, their life and their love? To believe in their virtue is a sort of social religion, for they are the ornament of the world, and form the chief glory of France.

It is in the midst of this million we are bound to investigate:

The number of honest women;

The number of virtuous women.

The work of investigating this and of arranging the results under two categories requires whole meditations, which may serve as an appendix to the present one.

MEDITATION III. OF THE HONEST WOMAN

The preceding meditation has proved that we possess in France a floating population of one million women reveling in the privilege of inspiring those passions which a gallant man avows without shame, or dissembles with delight. It is then among this million of women that we must carry our lantern of Diogenes in order to discover the honest women of the land.

This inquiry suggests certain digressions.

Two young people, well dressed, whose slender figures and rounded arms suggest a paver's tool, and whose boots are elegantly made, meet one morning on the boulevard, at the end of the Passage des Panoramas.

"What, is this you?"

"Yes, dear boy; it looks like me, doesn't it?"

Then they laugh, with more or less intelligence, according to the nature of the joke which opens the conversation.

When they have examined each other with the sly curiosity of a police officer on the lookout for a clue, when they are quite convinced of the newness of each other's gloves, of each other's waistcoat and of the taste with which their cravats are tied; when they are pretty certain that neither of them is down in the world, they link arms and if they start from the Theater des Varietes, they have not reached Frascati's before they have asked each other a roundabout question whose free translation may be this:

"Whom are you living with now?"

As a general rule she is a charming woman.

Who is the infantryman of Paris into whose ear there have not dropped, like bullets in the day of battle, thousands of words uttered by the passer-by, and who has not caught one of those numberless sayings which, according to Rabelais, hang frozen in the air? But the majority of men take their way through Paris in the same manner as they live and eat, that is, without thinking about it. There are very few skillful musicians, very few practiced physiognomists who can recognize the key in which these vagrant notes are set, the passion that prompts these floating words. Ah! to wander over Paris! What an adorable and delightful existence is that! To saunter is a science; it is the gastronomy of the eye. To take a walk is to vegetate; to saunter is to live. The young and pretty women, long contemplated with ardent eyes, would be much more admissible in claiming a salary than the cook who asks for twenty sous from the Limousin whose nose with inflated nostrils took in the perfumes of beauty. To saunter is to enjoy life; it is to indulge the flight of fancy; it is to enjoy the sublime pictures of misery, of love, of joy, of gracious or grotesque physiognomies; it is to pierce with a glance the abysses of a thousand existences; for the young it is to desire all, and to possess all; for the old it is to live the life of the youthful, and to share their passions. Now how many answers have not the sauntering artists heard to the categorical question which is always with us?

"She is thirty-five years old, but you would not think she was more than twenty!" said an enthusiastic youth with sparkling eyes, who, freshly liberated from college, would, like Cherubin, embrace all.

"Zounds! Mine has dressing-gowns of batiste and diamond rings for the evening!" said a lawyer's clerk.

"But she has a box at the Francais!" said an army officer.

"At any rate," cried another one, an elderly man who spoke as if he were standing on the defence, "she does not cost me a sou! In our case – wouldn't you like to have the same chance, my respected friend?"

And he patted his companion lightly on the shoulder.

“Oh! she loves me!” said another. “It seems too good to be true; but she has the most stupid of husbands! Ah! – Buffon has admirably described the animals, but the biped called husband – ”

What a pleasant thing for a married man to hear!

“Oh! what an angel you are, my dear!” is the answer to a request discreetly whispered into the ear.

“Can you tell me her name or point her out to me?”

“Oh! no; she is an honest woman.”

When a student is loved by a waitress, he mentions her name with pride and takes his friends to lunch at her house. If a young man loves a woman whose husband is engaged in some trade dealing with articles of necessity, he will answer, blushing, “She is the wife of a haberdasher, of a stationer, of a hatter, of a linen-draper, of a clerk, etc.”

But this confession of love for an inferior which buds and blows in the midst of packages, loaves of sugar, or flannel waistcoats is always accompanied with an exaggerated praise of the lady’s fortune. The husband alone is engaged in the business; he is rich; he has fine furniture. The loved one comes to her lover’s house; she wears a cashmere shawl; she owns a country house, etc.

In short, a young man is never wanting in excellent arguments to prove that his mistress is very nearly, if not quite, an honest woman. This distinction originates in the refinement of our manners and has become as indefinite as the line which separates *bon ton* from vulgarity. What then is meant by an honest woman?

On this point the vanity of women, of their lovers, and even that of their husbands, is so sensitive that we had better here settle upon some general rules, which are the result of long observation.

Our one million of privileged women represent a multitude who are eligible for the glorious title of honest women, but by no means all are elected to it. The principles on which these elections are based may be found in the following axioms:

APHORISMS

I

An honest woman is necessarily a married woman.

II

An honest woman is under forty years old.

III

A married woman whose favors are to be paid for is not an honest woman.

IV

A married woman who keeps a private carriage is an honest woman.

V

A woman who does her own cooking is not an honest woman.

VI

When a man has made enough to yield an income of twenty thousand francs, his wife is an honest woman, whatever the business in which his fortune was made.

VII

A woman who says “letter of change” for letter of exchange, who says of a man, “He is an elegant gentleman,” can never be an honest woman, whatever fortune she possesses.

VIII

An honest woman ought to be in a financial condition such as forbids her lover to think she will ever cost him anything.

IX

A woman who lives on the third story of any street excepting the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue de Castiglione is not an honest woman.

X

The wife of a banker is always an honest woman, but the woman who sits at the cashier's desk cannot be one, unless her husband has a very large business and she does not live over his shop.

XI

The unmarried niece of a bishop when she lives with him can pass for an honest woman, because if she has an intrigue she has to deceive her uncle.

XII

An honest woman is one whom her lover fears to compromise.

XIII

The wife of an artist is always an honest woman.

By the application of these principles even a man from Ardeche can resolve all the difficulties which our subject presents.

In order that a woman may be able to keep a cook, may be finely educated, may possess the sentiment of coquetry, may have the right to pass whole hours in her boudoir lying on a sofa, and may live a life of soul, she must have at least six thousand francs a year if she lives in the country, and twenty thousand if she lives at Paris. These two financial limits will suggest to you how many honest women are to be reckoned on in the million, for they are really a mere product of our statistical calculations.

Now three hundred thousand independent people, with an income of fifteen thousand francs, represent the sum total of those who live on pensions, on annuities and the interest of treasury bonds and mortgages.

Three hundred thousand landed proprietors enjoy an income of three thousand five hundred francs and represent all territorial wealth.

Two hundred thousand payees, at the rate of fifteen hundred francs each, represent the distribution of public funds by the state budget, by the budgets of the cities and departments, less the national debt, church funds and soldier's pay, (i.e. five sous a day with allowances for washing, weapons, victuals, clothes, etc.).

Two hundred thousand fortunes amassed in commerce, reckoning the capital at twenty thousand francs in each case, represent all the commercial establishments possible in France.

Here we have a million husbands represented.

But at what figure shall we count those who have an income of fifty, of a hundred, of two, three, four, five, and six hundred francs only, from consols or some other investment?

How many landed proprietors are there who pay taxes amounting to no more than a hundred sous, twenty francs, one hundred francs, two hundred, or two hundred and eighty?

At what number shall we reckon those of the governmental leeches, who are merely quill-drivers with a salary of six hundred francs a year?

How many merchants who have nothing but a fictitious capital shall we admit? These men are rich in credit and have not a single actual sou, and resemble the sieves through which Pactolus flows. And how many brokers whose real capital does not amount to more than a thousand, two thousand, four thousand, five thousand francs? Business! – my respects to you!

Let us suppose more people to be fortunate than actually are so. Let us divide this million into parts; five hundred thousand domestic establishments will have an income ranging from a hundred to three thousand francs, and five thousand women will fulfill the conditions which entitle them to be called honest women.

After these observations, which close our meditation on statistics, we are entitled to cut out of this number one hundred thousand individuals; consequently we can consider it to be proven mathematically that there exist in France no more than four hundred thousand women who can furnish to men of refinement the exquisite and exalted enjoyments which they look for in love.

And here it is fitting to make a remark to the adepts for whom we write, that love does not consist in a series of eager conversations, of nights of pleasure, of an occasional caress more or less well-timed and a spark of *amour-propre* baptized by the name of jealousy. Our four hundred thousand women are not of those concerning whom it may be said, “The most beautiful girl in the world can give only what she has.” No, they are richly endowed with treasures which appeal to our ardent imaginations, they know how to sell dear that which they do not possess, in order to compensate for the vulgarity of that which they give.

Do we feel more pleasure in kissing the glove of a grisette than in draining the five minutes of pleasure which all women offer to us?

Is it the conversation of a shop-girl which makes you expect boundless delights?

In your intercourse with a woman who is beneath you, the delight of flattered *amour-propre* is on her side. You are not in the secret of the happiness which you give.

In a case of a woman above you, either in fortune or social position, the ticklings of vanity are not only intense, but are equally shared. A man can never raise his mistress to his own level; but a woman always puts her lover in the position that she herself occupies. “I can make princes and you can make nothing but bastards,” is an answer sparkling with truth.

If love is the first of passions, it is because it flatters all the rest of them at the same time. We love with more or less intensity in proportion to the number of chords which are touched by the fingers of a beautiful mistress.

Biren, the jeweler’s son, climbing into the bed of the Duchesse de Courlande and helping her to sign an agreement that he should be proclaimed sovereign of the country, as he was already of the young and beautiful queen, is an example of the happiness which ought to be given to their lovers by our four hundred thousand women.

If a man would have the right to make stepping-stones of all the heads which crowd a drawing-room, he must be the lover of some artistic woman of fashion. Now we all love more or less to be at the top.

It is on this brilliant section of the nation that the attack is made by men whose education, talent or wit gives them the right to be considered persons of importance with regard to that success of which people of every country are so proud; and only among this class of women is the wife to be found whose heart has to be defended at all hazard by our husband.

What does it matter whether the considerations which arise from the existence of a feminine aristocracy are or are not equally applicable to other social classes? That which is true of all women exquisite in manners, language and thought, in whom exceptional educational facilities have developed a taste for art and a capacity for feeling, comparing and thinking, who have a high sense of propriety and politeness and who actually set the fashion in French manners, ought to be true also in the case of women whatever their nation and whatever their condition. The man of distinction to whom this book is dedicated must of necessity possess a certain mental vision, which makes him perceive the various degrees of light that fill each class and comprehend the exact point in the scale of civilization to which each of our remarks is severally applicable.

Would it not be then in the highest interests of morality, that we should in the meantime try to find out the number of virtuous women who are to be found among these adorable creatures? Is not this a question of marito-national importance?

MEDITATION IV. OF THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

The question, perhaps, is not so much how many virtuous women there are, as what possibility there is of an honest woman remaining virtuous.

In order to throw light upon a point so important, let us cast a rapid glance over the male population.

From among our fifteen millions of men we must cut off, in the first place, the nine millions of bimana of thirty-two vertebrae and exclude from our physiological analysis all but six millions of people. The Marceaus, the Massenans, the Rousseaus, the Diderots and the Rollins often sprout forth suddenly from the social swamp, when it is in a condition of fermentation; but, here we plead guilty of deliberate inaccuracy. These errors in calculation are likely, however, to give all their weight to our conclusion and to corroborate what we are forced to deduce in unveiling the mechanism of passion.

From the six millions of privileged men, we must exclude three millions of old men and children.

It will be affirmed by some one that this subtraction leaves a remainder of four millions in the case of women.

This difference at first sight seems singular, but is easily accounted for.

The average age at which women are married is twenty years and at forty they cease to belong to the world of love.

Now a young bachelor of seventeen is apt to make deep cuts with his penknife in the parchment of contracts, as the chronicles of scandal will tell you.

On the other hand, a man at fifty-two is more formidable than at any other age. It is at this fair epoch of life that he enjoys an experience dearly bought, and probably all the fortune that he will ever require. The passions by which his course is directed being the last under whose scourge he will move, he is un pitying and determined, like the man carried away by a current who snatches at a green and pliant branch of willow, the young nursling of the year.

XIV

Physically a man is a man much longer than a woman is a woman.

With regard to marriage, the difference in duration of the life of love with a man and with a woman is fifteen years. This period is equal to three-fourths of the time during which the infidelities of the woman can bring unhappiness to her husband. Nevertheless, the remainder in our subtraction from the sum of men only differs by a sixth or so from that which results in our subtraction from the sum of women.

Great is the modest caution of our estimates. As to our arguments, they are founded on evidence so widely known, that we have only expounded them for the sake of being exact and in order to anticipate all criticism.

It has, therefore, been proved to the mind of every philosopher, however little disposed he may be to forming numerical estimates, that there exists in France a floating mass of three million men between seventeen and fifty-two, all perfectly alive, well provided with teeth, quite resolved on biting, in fact, biting and asking nothing better than the opportunity of walking strong and upright along the way to Paradise.

The above observations entitle us to separate from this mass of men a million husbands. Suppose for an instant that these, being satisfied and always happy, like our model husband, confine themselves to conjugal love.

Our remainder of two millions do not require five sous to make love.

It is quite sufficient for a man to have a fine foot and a clear eye in order to dismantle the portrait of a husband.

It is not necessary that he should have a handsome face nor even a good figure;

Provided that a man appears to be intellectual and has a distinguished expression of face, women never look where he comes from but where he is going to;

The charms of youth are the unique equipage of love;

A coat made by Brisson, a pair of gloves bought from Boivin, elegant shoes, for whose payment the dealer trembles, a well-tied cravat are sufficient to make a man king of the drawing-room;

And soldiers – although the passion for gold lace and aiguillettes has died away – do not soldiers form of themselves a redoubtable legion of celibates? Not to mention Eginhard – for he was a private secretary – has not a newspaper recently recorded how a German princess bequeathed her fortune to a simple lieutenant of cuirassiers in the imperial guard?

But the notary of the village, who in the wilds of Gascony does not draw more than thirty-six deeds a year, sends his son to study law at Paris; the latter wishes his son to be a notary, the lawyer destines his to be a judge, the judge wishes to become a minister in order that his sons may be peers. At no epoch in the world's history has there been so eager a thirst for education. To-day it is not intellect but cleverness that promenades the streets. From every crevice in the rocky surface of society brilliant flowers burst forth as the spring brings them on the walls of a ruin; even in the caverns there droop from the vaulted roof faintly colored tufts of green vegetation. The sun of education permeates all. Since this vast development of thought, this even and fruitful diffusion of light, we have scarcely any men of superiority, because every single man represents the whole education of his age. We are surrounded by living encyclopaedias who walk about, think, act and wish to be immortalized. Hence the frightful catastrophes of climbing ambitions and insensate passions. We feel the want of other worlds; there are more hives needed to receive the swarms, and especially are we in need of more pretty women.

But the maladies by which a man is afflicted do not nullify the sum total of human passion. To our shame be it spoken, a woman is never so much attached to us as when we are sick.

With this thought, all the epigrams written against the little sex – for it is antiquated nowadays to say the fair sex – ought to be disarmed of their point and changed into madrigals of eulogy! All men ought to consider that the sole virtue of a woman is to love and that all women are prodigiously virtuous, and at that point to close the book and end their meditation.

Ah! do you not remember that black and gloomy hour when lonely and suffering, making accusations against men and especially against your friends, weak, discouraged, and filled with thoughts of death, your head supported by a fevered pillow and stretched upon a sheet whose white trellis-work of linen was stamped upon your skin, you traced with your eyes the green paper which covered the walls of your silent chamber? Do you recollect, I say, seeing some one noiselessly open your door, exhibiting her fair young face, framed with rolls of gold, and a bonnet which you had never seen before? She seemed like a star in a stormy night, smiling and stealing towards you with an expression in which distress and happiness were blended, and flinging herself into your arms!

“How did you manage it? What did you tell your husband?” you ask.

“Your husband!” – Ah! this brings us back again into the depths of our subject.

XV

Morally the man is more often and longer a man than the woman is a woman.

On the other hand we ought to consider that among these two millions of celibates there are many unhappy men, in whom a profound sense of their misery and persistent toil have quenched the instinct of love;

That they have not all passed through college, that there are many artisans among them, many footmen – the Duke of Gevres, an extremely plain and short man, as he walked through the park of Versailles saw several lackeys of fine appearance and said to his friends, “Look how these fellows are made by us, and how they imitate us” – that there are many contractors, many trades people who think of nothing but money; many drudges of the shop;

That there are men more stupid and actually more ugly than God would have made them;

That there are those whose character is like a chestnut without a kernel;

That the clergy are generally chaste;

That there are men so situated in life that they can never enter the brilliant sphere in which honest women move, whether for want of a coat, or from their bashfulness, or from the failure of a mahout to introduce them.

But let us leave to each one the task of adding to the number of these exceptions in accordance with his personal experience – for the object of a book is above all things to make people think – and let us instantly suppress one-half of the sum total and admit only that there are one million of hearts worthy of paying homage to honest women. This number approximately includes those who are superior in all departments. Women love only the intellectual, but justice must be done to virtue.

As for these amiable celibates, each of them relates a string of adventures, all of which seriously compromise honest women. It would be a very moderate and reserved computation to attribute no more than three adventures to each celibate; but if some of them count their adventures by the dozen, there are many more who confine themselves to two or three incidents of passion and some to a single one in their whole life, so that we have in accordance with the statistical method taken the average. Now if the number of celibates be multiplied by the number of their excesses in love the result will be three millions of adventures; to set against this we have only four hundred thousand honest women!

If the God of goodness and indulgence who hovers over the worlds does not make a second washing of the human race, it is doubtless because so little success attended the first.

Here then we have a people, a society which has been sifted, and you see the result!

XVI

Manners are the hypocrisy of nations, and hypocrisy is more or less perfect.

XVII

Virtue, perhaps, is nothing more than politeness of soul.

Physical love is a craving like hunger, excepting that man eats all the time, and in love his appetite is neither so persistent nor so regular as at the table.

A piece of bread and a carafe of water will satisfy the hunger of any man; but our civilization has brought to light the science of gastronomy.

Love has its piece of bread, but it has also its science of loving, that science which we call coquetry, a delightful word which the French alone possess, for that science originated in this country.

Well, after all, isn't it enough to enrage all husbands when they think that man is so endowed with an innate desire to change from one food to another, that in some savage countries, where travelers have landed, they have found alcoholic drinks and ragouts?

Hunger is not so violent as love; but the caprices of the soul are more numerous, more bewitching, more exquisite in their intensity than the caprices of gastronomy; but all that the poets and the experiences of our own life have revealed to us on the subject of love, arms us celibates with a terrible power: we are the lion of the Gospel seeking whom we may devour.

Then, let every one question his conscience on this point, and search his memory if he has ever met a man who confined himself to the love of one woman only!

How, alas! are we to explain, while respecting the honor of all the peoples, the problem which results from the fact that three millions of burning hearts can find no more than four hundred thousand women on which they can feed? Should we apportion four celibates for each woman and remember that the honest women would have already established, instinctively and unconsciously, a sort of understanding between themselves and the celibates, like that which the presidents of royal courts have initiated, in order to make their partisans in each chamber enter successively after a certain number of years?

That would be a mournful way of solving the difficulty!

Should we make the conjecture that certain honest women act in dividing up the celibates, as the lion in the fable did? What! Surely, in that case, half at least of our altars would become whited sepulchres!

Ought one to suggest for the honor of French ladies that in the time of peace all other countries should import into France a certain number of their honest women, and that these countries should mainly consist of England, Germany and Russia? But the European nations would in that case attempt to balance matters by demanding that France should export a certain number of her pretty women.

Morality and religion suffer so much from such calculations as this, that an honest man, in an attempt to prove the innocence of married women, finds some reason to believe that dowagers and young people are half of them involved in this general corruption, and are liars even more truly than are the celibates.

But to what conclusion does our calculation lead us? Think of our husbands, who to the disgrace of morals behave almost all of them like celibates and glory *in petto* over their secret adventures.

Why, then we believe that every married man, who is at all attached to his wife from honorable motives, can, in the words of the elder Corneille, seek a rope and a nail; *foenum habet in cornu*.

It is, however, in the bosom of these four hundred thousand honest women that we must, lantern in hand, seek for the number of the virtuous women in France! As a matter of fact, we have by our statistics of marriage so far only set down the number of those creatures with which society has really nothing to do. Is it not true that in France the honest people, the people *comme il faut*, form a total of scarcely three million individuals, namely, our one million of celibates, five hundred thousand honest women, five hundred thousand husbands, and a million of dowagers, of infants and of young girls?

Are you then astonished at the famous verse of Boileau? This verse proves that the poet had cleverly fathomed the discovery mathematically propounded to you in these tiresome meditations and that his language is by no means hyperbolic.

Nevertheless, virtuous women there certainly are:

Yes, those who have never been tempted and those who die at their first child-birth, assuming that their husbands had married them virgins;

Yes, those who are ugly as the Kaifakatadary of the Arabian Nights;

Yes, those whom Mirabeau calls “fairy cucumbers” and who are composed of atoms exactly like those of strawberry and water-lily roots. Nevertheless, we need not believe that!

Further, we acknowledge that, to the credit of our age, we meet, ever since the revival of morality and religion and during our own times, some women, here and there, so moral, so religious, so devoted to their duties, so upright, so precise, so stiff, so virtuous, so – that the devil himself dare not even look at them; they are guarded on all sides by rosaries, hours of prayer and directors. Pshaw!

We will not attempt to enumerate the women who are virtuous from stupidity, for it is acknowledged that in love all women have intellect.

In conclusion, we may remark that it is not impossible that there exist in some corner of the earth women, young, pretty and virtuous, whom the world does not suspect.

But you must not give the name of virtuous woman to her who, in her struggle against an involuntary passion, has yielded nothing to her lover whom she idolizes. She does injury in the most cruel way in which it can possibly be done to a loving husband. For what remains to him of his wife? A thing without name, a living corpse. In the very midst of delight his wife remains like the guest who has been warned by Borgia that certain meats were poisoned; he felt no hunger, he ate sparingly or pretended to eat. He longed for the meat which he had abandoned for that provided by the terrible cardinal, and sighed for the moment when the feast was over and he could leave the table.

What is the result which these reflections on the feminine virtue lead to? Here they are; but the last two maxims have been given us by an eclectic philosopher of the eighteenth century.

XVIII

A virtuous woman has in her heart one fibre less or one fibre more than other women; she is either stupid or sublime.

XIX

The virtue of women is perhaps a question of temperament.

XX

The most virtuous women have in them something which is never chaste.

XXI

“That a man of intellect has doubts about his mistress is conceivable, but about his wife! – that would be too stupid.”

XXII

“Men would be insufferably unhappy if in the presence of women they thought the least bit in the world of that which they know by heart.”

The number of those rare women who, like the Virgins of the Parable, have kept their lamps lighted, will always appear very small in the eyes of the defenders of virtue and fine feeling; but we must needs exclude it from the total sum of honest women, and this subtraction, consoling as it is, will increase the danger which threatens husbands, will intensify the scandal of their married life, and involve, more or less, the reputation of all other lawful spouses.

What husband will be able to sleep peacefully beside his young and beautiful wife while he knows that three celibates, at least, are on the watch; that if they have not already encroached upon his little property, they regard the bride as their destined prey, for sooner or later she will fall into their hands, either by stratagem, compulsive conquest or free choice? And it is impossible that they should fail some day or other to obtain victory!

What a startling conclusion!

On this point the purist in morality, the *collets montes* will accuse us perhaps of presenting here conclusions which are excessively despairing; they will be desirous of putting up a defence, either for the virtuous women or the celibates; but we have in reserve for them a final remark.

Increase the number of honest women and diminish the number of celibates, as much as you choose, you will always find that the result will be a larger number of gallant adventurers than of honest women; you will always find a vast multitude driven through social custom to commit three sorts of crime.

If they remain chaste, their health is injured, while they are the slaves of the most painful torture; they disappoint the sublime ends of nature, and finally die of consumption, drinking milk on the mountains of Switzerland!

If they yield to legitimate temptations, they either compromise the honest women, and on this point we re-enter on the subject of this book, or else they debase themselves by a horrible intercourse with the five hundred thousand women of whom we spoke in the third category of the first Meditation, and in this case, have still considerable chance of visiting Switzerland, drinking milk and dying there!

Have you never been struck, as we have been, by a certain error of organization in our social order, the evidence of which gives a moral certainty to our last calculations?

The average age at which a man marries is thirty years; the average age at which his passions, his most violent desires for genesial delight are developed, is twenty years. Now during the ten fairest years of his life, during the green season in which his beauty, his youth and his wit make him more dangerous to husbands than at any other epoch of his life, he finds himself without any means of satisfying legitimately that irresistible craving for love which burns in his whole nature. During this time, representing the sixth part of human life, we are obliged to admit that the sixth part or less of our total male population and the sixth part which is the most vigorous is placed in a position which is perpetually exhausting for them, and dangerous for society.

“Why don’t they get married?” cries a religious woman.

But what father of good sense would wish his son to be married at twenty years of age?

Is not the danger of these precocious unions apparent at all? It would seem as if marriage was a state very much at variance with natural habitude, seeing that it requires a special ripeness of judgment in those who conform to it. All the world knows what Rousseau said: “There must always be a period of libertinage in life either in one state or another. It is an evil leaven which sooner or later ferments.”

Now what mother of a family is there who would expose her daughter to the risk of this fermentation when it has not yet taken place?

On the other hand, what need is there to justify a fact under whose domination all societies exist? Are there not in every country, as we have demonstrated, a vast number of men who live as honestly as possible, without being either celibates or married men?

Cannot these men, the religious women will always ask, abide in continence like the priests?

Certainly, madame.

Nevertheless, we venture to observe that the vow of chastity is the most startling exception to the natural condition of man which society makes necessary; but continence is the great point in the priest’s profession; he must be chaste, as the doctor must be insensible to physical sufferings, as the notary and the advocate insensible to the misery whose wounds are laid bare to their eyes, as the soldier to the sight of death which he meets on the field of battle. From the fact that the requirements of civilization ossify certain fibres of the heart and render callous certain membranes, we must not necessarily conclude that all men are bound to undergo this partial and exceptional death of the soul. This would be to reduce the human race to a condition of atrocious moral suicide.

But let it be granted that, in the atmosphere of a drawing-room the most Jansenistic in the world, appears a young man of twenty-eight who has scrupulously guarded his robe of innocence and is as truly virginal as the heath-cock which gourmands enjoy. Do you not see that the most austere of virtuous women would merely pay him a sarcastic compliment on his courage; the magistrate, the

strictest that ever mounted a bench, would shake his head and smile, and all the ladies would hide themselves, so that he might not hear their laughter? When the heroic and exceptional young victim leaves the drawing-room, what a deluge of jokes bursts upon his innocent head? What a shower of insults! What is held to be more shameful in France than impotence, than coldness, than the absence of all passion, than simplicity?

The only king of France who would not have laughed was perhaps Louis XIII; but as for his r ou of a father, he would perhaps have banished the young man, either under the accusation that he was no Frenchman or from a conviction that he was setting a dangerous example.

Strange contradiction! A young man is equally blamed if he passes life in Holy Land, to use an expression of bachelor life. Could it possibly be for the benefit of the honest women that the prefects of police, and mayors of all time have ordained that the passions of the public shall not manifest themselves until nightfall, and shall cease at eleven o'clock in the evening?

Where do you wish that our mass of celibates should sow their wild oats? And who is deceived on this point? as Figaro asks. Is it the governments or the governed? The social order is like the small boys who stop their ears at the theatre, so as not to hear the report of the firearms. Is society afraid to probe its wound or has it recognized the fact that evil is irremediable and things must be allowed to run their course? But there crops up here a question of legislation, for it is impossible to escape the material and social dilemma created by this balance of public virtue in the matter of marriage. It is not our business to solve this difficulty; but suppose for a moment that society in order to save a multitude of families, women and honest girls, found itself compelled to grant to certain licensed hearts the right of satisfying the desire of the celibates; ought not our laws then to raise up a professional body consisting of female Decii who devote themselves for the republic, and make a rampart of their bodies round the honest families? The legislators have been very wrong hitherto in disdaining to regulate the lot of courtesans.

XXIII

The courtesan is an institution if she is a necessity.

This question bristles with so many ifs and buts that we will bequeath it for solution to our descendants; it is right that we shall leave them something to do. Moreover, its discussion is not germane to this work; for in this, more than in any other age, there is a great outburst of sensibility; at no other epoch have there been so many rules of conduct, because never before has it been so completely accepted that pleasure comes from the heart. Now, what man of sentiment is there, what celibate is there, who, in the presence of four hundred thousand young and pretty women arrayed in the splendors of fortune and the graces of wit, rich in treasures of coquetry, and lavish in the dispensing of happiness, would wish to go – ? For shame!

Let us put forth for the benefit of our future legislature in clear and brief axioms the result arrived at during the last few years.

XXIV

In the social order, inevitable abuses are laws of nature, in accordance with which mankind should frame their civil and political institutes.

XXV

“Adultery is like a commercial failure, with this difference,” says Chamfort, “that it is the innocent party who has been ruined and who bears the disgrace.”

In France the laws that relate to adultery and those that relate to bankruptcy require great modifications. Are they too indulgent? Do they sin on the score of bad principles? *Caveant consules!*

Come now, courageous athlete, who have taken as your task that which is expressed in the little apostrophe which our first Meditation addresses to people who have the charge of a wife, what are you going to say about it? We hope that this rapid review of the question does not make you tremble, that you are not one of those men whose nervous fluid congeals at the sight of a precipice or a boa constrictor! Well! my friend, he who owns soil has war and toil. The men who want your gold are more numerous than those who want your wife.

After all, husbands are free to take these trifles for arithmetical estimates, or arithmetical estimates for trifles. The illusions of life are the best things in life; that which is most respectable in life is our futile credulity. Do there not exist many people whose principles are merely prejudices, and who not having the force of character to form their own ideas of happiness and virtue accept what is ready made for them by the hand of legislators? Nor do we address those Manfreds who having taken off too many garments wish to raise all the curtains, that is, in moments when they are tortured by a sort of moral spleen. By them, however, the question is boldly stated and we know the extent of the evil.

It remains that we should examine the chances and changes which each man is likely to meet in marriage, and which may weaken him in that struggle from which our champion should issue victorious.

MEDITATION V. OF THE PREDESTINED

Predestined means destined in advance for happiness or unhappiness. Theology has seized upon this word and employs it in relation to the happy; we give to the term a meaning which is unfortunate to our elect of which one can say in opposition to the Gospel, “Many are called, many are chosen.”

Experience has demonstrated that there are certain classes of men more subject than others to certain infirmities; the Gascons are given to exaggeration and Parisians to vanity. As we see that apoplexy attacks people with short necks, or butchers are liable to carbuncle, as gout attacks the rich, health the poor, deafness kings, paralysis administrators, so it has been remarked that certain classes of husbands and their wives are more given to illegitimate passions. Thus they forestall the celibates, they form another sort of aristocracy. If any reader should be enrolled in one of these aristocratic classes he will, we hope, have sufficient presence of mind, he or at least his wife, instantly to call to mind the favorite axiom of Lhomond’s Latin Grammar: “No rule without exception.” A friend of the house may even recite the verse —

“Present company always excepted.”

And then every one will have the right to believe, *in petto*, that he forms the exception. But our duty, the interest which we take in husbands and the keen desire which we have to preserve young and pretty women from the caprices and catastrophes which a lover brings in his train, force us to give notice to husbands that they ought to be especially on their guard.

In this recapitulation first are to be reckoned the husbands whom business, position or public office calls from their houses and detains for a definite time. It is these who are the standard-bearers of the brotherhood.

Among them, we would reckon magistrates, holding office during pleasure or for life, and obliged to remain at the Palace for the greater portion of the day; other functionaries sometimes find means to leave their office at business hours; but a judge or a public prosecutor, seated on his cushion of lilies, is bound even to die during the progress of the hearing. There is his field of battle.

It is the same with the deputies and peers who discuss the laws, of ministers who share the toils of the king, of secretaries who work with the ministers, of soldiers on campaign, and indeed with the corporal of the police patrol, as the letter of Lafleur, in the *Sentimental Journey*, plainly shows.

Next to the men who are obliged to be absent from home at certain fixed hours, come the men whom vast and serious undertakings leave not one minute for love-making; their foreheads are always wrinkled with anxiety, their conversation is generally void of merriment.

At the head of these unfortunates we must place the bankers, who toil in the acquisition of millions, whose heads are so full of calculations that the figures burst through their skulls and range themselves in columns of addition on their foreheads.

These millionaires, forgetting most of the time the sacred laws of marriage and the attention due to the tender flower which they have undertaken to cultivate, never think of watering it or of defending it from the heat and cold. They scarcely recognize the fact that the happiness of their spouses is in their keeping; if they ever do remember this, it is at table, when they see seated before them a woman in rich array, or when a coquette, fearing their brutal repulse, comes, gracious as Venus, to ask them for cash — Oh! it is then, that they recall, sometimes very vividly, the rights specified in the two hundred and thirteenth article of the civil code, and their wives are grateful to them; but like the heavy tariff which the law lays upon foreign merchandise, their wives suffer and pay the tribute, in virtue of the axiom which says: “There is no pleasure without pain.”

The men of science who spend whole months in gnawing at the bone of an antediluvian monster, in calculating the laws of nature, when there is an opportunity to peer into her secrets, the Grecians and Latinists who dine on a thought of Tacitus, sup on a phrase of Thucydides, spend their life in

brushing the dust from library shelves, in keeping guard over a commonplace book, or a papyrus, are all predestined. So great is their abstraction or their ecstasy, that nothing that goes on around them strikes their attention. Their unhappiness is consummated; in full light of noon they scarcely even perceive it. Oh happy men! a thousand times happy! Example: Beauzee, returning home after session at the Academy, surprises his wife with a German. “Did not I tell you, madame, that it was necessary that I shall go,” cried the stranger. “My dear sir,” interrupted the academician, “you ought to say that I *should* go!”

Then there come, lyre in hand, certain poets whose whole animal strength has left the ground floor and mounted to the upper story. They know better how to mount Pegasus than the beast of old Peter, they rarely marry, although they are accustomed to lavish the fury of their passions on some wandering or imaginary Chloris.

But the men whose noses are stained with snuff;

But those who, to their misfortune, have a perpetual cold in their head;

But the sailors who smoke or chew;

But those men whose dry and bilious temperament makes them always look as if they had eaten a sour apple;

But the men who in private life have certain cynical habits, ridiculous fads, and who always, in spite of everything, look unwashed;

But the husbands who have obtained the degrading name of “hen-pecked”;

Finally the old men who marry young girls.

All these people are *par excellence* among the predestined.

There is a final class of the predestined whose ill-fortune is almost certain, we mean restless and irritable men, who are inclined to meddle and tyrannize, who have a great idea of domestic domination, who openly express their low ideas of women and who know no more about life than herrings about natural history. When these men marry, their homes have the appearance of a wasp whose head a schoolboy has cut off, and who dances here and there on a window pane. For this sort of predestined the present work is a sealed book. We do not write any more for those imbeciles, walking effigies, who are like the statues of a cathedral, than for those old machines of Marly which are too weak to fling water over the hedges of Versailles without being in danger of sudden collapse.

I rarely make my observations on the conjugal oddities with which the drawing-room is usually full, without recalling vividly a sight which I once enjoyed in early youth:

In 1819 I was living in a thatched cottage situated in the bosom of the delightful valley l’Isle-Adam. My hermitage neighbored on the park of Cassan, the sweetest of retreats, the most fascinating in aspect, the most attractive as a place to ramble in, the most cool and refreshing in summer, of all places created by luxury and art. This verdant country-seat owes its origin to a farmer-general of the good old times, a certain Bergeret, celebrated for his originality; who among other fantastic dandyisms adopted the habit of going to the opera, with his hair powdered in gold; he used to light up his park for his own solitary delectation and on one occasion ordered a sumptuous entertainment there, in which he alone took part. This rustic Sardanapalus returned from Italy so passionately charmed with the scenery of that beautiful country that, by a sudden freak of enthusiasm, he spent four or five millions in order to represent in his park the scenes of which he had pictures in his portfolio. The most charming contrasts of foliage, the rarest trees, long valleys, and prospects the most picturesque that could be brought from abroad, Borromean islands floating on clear eddying streams like so many rays, which concentrate their various lustres on a single point, on an Isola Bella, from which the enchanted eye takes in each detail at its leisure, or on an island in the bosom of which is a little house concealed under the drooping foliage of a century-old ash, an island fringed with irises, rose-bushes, and flowers which appears like an emerald richly set. Ah! one might rove a thousand leagues for such a place! The most sickly, the most soured, the most disgusted of our men of genius in ill health would die of satiety at the end of fifteen days, overwhelmed with the luscious sweetness of fresh life in such a spot.

The man who was quite regardless of the Eden which he thus possessed had neither wife nor children, but was attached to a large ape which he kept. A graceful turret of wood, supported by a sculptured column, served as a dwelling place for this vicious animal, who being kept chained and rarely petted by his eccentric master, oftener at Paris than in his country home, had gained a very bad reputation. I recollect seeing him once in the presence of certain ladies show almost as much insolence as if he had been a man. His master was obliged to kill him, so mischievous did he gradually become.

One morning while I was sitting under a beautiful tulip tree in flower, occupied in doing nothing but inhaling the lovely perfumes which the tall poplars kept confined within the brilliant enclosure, enjoying the silence of the groves, listening to the murmuring waters and the rustling leaves, admiring the blue gaps outlined above my head by clouds of pearly sheen and gold, wandering fancy free in dreams of my future, I heard some lout or other, who had arrived the day before from Paris, playing on a violin with the violence of a man who has nothing else to do. I would not wish for my worst enemy to hear anything so utterly in discord with the sublime harmony of nature. If the distant notes of Roland's Horn had only filled the air with life, perhaps – but a noisy fiddler like this, who undertakes to bring to you the expression of human ideas and the phraseology of music! This Amphion, who was walking up and down the dining-room, finished by taking a seat on the window-sill, exactly in front of the monkey. Perhaps he was looking for an audience. Suddenly I saw the animal quietly descend from his little dungeon, stand upon his hind feet, bow his head forward like a swimmer and fold his arms over his bosom like Spartacus in chains, or Catiline listening to Cicero. The banker, summoned by a sweet voice whose silvery tone recalled a boudoir not unknown to me, laid his violin on the window-sill and made off like a swallow who rejoins his companion by a rapid level swoop. The great monkey, whose chain was sufficiently long, approached the window and gravely took in hand the violin. I don't know whether you have ever had as I have the pleasure of seeing a monkey try to learn music, but at the present moment, when I laugh much less than I did in those careless days, I never think of that monkey without a smile; the semi-man began by grasping the instrument with his fist and by sniffing at it as if he were tasting the flavor of an apple. The snort from his nostrils probably produced a dull harmonious sound in the sonorous wood and then the orang-outang shook his head, turned over the violin, turned it back again, raised it up in the air, lowered it, held it straight out, shook it, put it to his ear, set it down, and picked it up again with a rapidity of movement peculiar to these agile creatures. He seemed to question the dumb wood with faltering sagacity and in his gestures there was something marvelous as well as infantile. At last he undertook with grotesque gestures to place the violin under his chin, while in one hand he held the neck; but like a spoiled child he soon wearied of a study which required skill not to be obtained in a moment and he twitched the strings without being able to draw forth anything but discordant sounds. He seemed annoyed, laid the violin on the window-sill and snatching up the bow he began to push it to and fro with violence, like a mason sawing a block of stone. This effort only succeeded in wearying his fastidious ears, and he took the bow with both hands and snapped it in two on the innocent instrument, source of harmony and delight. It seemed as if I saw before me a schoolboy holding under him a companion lying face downwards, while he pommelled him with a shower of blows from his fist, as if to punish him for some delinquency. The violin being now tried and condemned, the monkey sat down upon the fragments of it and amused himself with stupid joy in mixing up the yellow strings of the broken bow.

Never since that day have I been able to look upon the home of the predestined without comparing the majority of husbands to this orang-outang trying to play the violin.

Love is the most melodious of all harmonies and the sentiment of love is innate. Woman is a delightful instrument of pleasure, but it is necessary to know its trembling strings, to study the position of them, the timid keyboard, the fingering so changeful and capricious which befits it. How many monkeys – men, I mean – marry without knowing what a woman is! How many of the predestined proceed with their wives as the ape of Cassan did with his violin! They have broken the heart which they did not understand, as they might dim and disdain the amulet whose secret was unknown to

them. They are children their whole life through, who leave life with empty hands after having talked about love, about pleasure, about licentiousness and virtue as slaves talk about liberty. Almost all of them married with the most profound ignorance of women and of love. They commenced by breaking in the door of a strange house and expected to be welcomed in this drawing-room. But the rudest artist knows that between him and his instrument, of wood, or of ivory, there exists a mysterious sort of friendship. He knows by experience that it takes years to establish this understanding between an inert matter and himself. He did not discover, at the first touch, the resources, the caprices, the deficiencies, the excellencies of his instrument. It did not become a living soul for him, a source of incomparable melody until he had studied for a long time; man and instrument did not come to understand each other like two friends, until both of them had been skillfully questioned and tested by frequent intercourse.

Can a man ever learn woman and know how to decipher this wondrous strain of music, by remaining through life like a seminarian in his cell? Is it possible that a man who makes it his business to think for others, to judge others, to rule others, to steal money from others, to feed, to heal, to wound others – that, in fact, any of our predestined, can spare time to study a woman? They sell their time for money, how can they give it away for happiness? Money is their god. No one can serve two masters at the same time. Is not the world, moreover, full of young women who drag along pale and weak, sickly and suffering? Some of them are the prey of feverish inflammations more or less serious, others lie under the cruel tyranny of nervous attacks more or less violent. All the husbands of these women belong to the class of the ignorant and the predestined. They have caused their own misfortune and expended as much pains in producing it as the husband artist would have bestowed in bringing to flower the late and delightful blooms of pleasure. The time which an ignorant man passes to consummate his own ruin is precisely that which a man of knowledge employs in the education of his happiness.

XXVI

Do not begin marriage by a violation of law.

In the preceding meditations we have indicated the extent of the evil with the reckless audacity of those surgeons, who boldly induce the formation of false tissues under which a shameful wound is concealed. Public virtue, transferred to the table of our amphitheatre, has lost even its carcass under the strokes of the scalpel. Lover or husband, have you smiled, or have you trembled at this evil? Well, it is with malicious delight that we lay this huge social burden on the conscience of the predestined. Harlequin, when he tried to find out whether his horse could be accustomed to go without food, was not more ridiculous than the men who wish to find happiness in their home and yet refuse to cultivate it with all the pains which it demands. The errors of women are so many indictments of egotism, neglect and worthlessness in husbands.

Yet it is yours, reader, it pertains to you, who have often condemned in another the crime which you yourself commit, it is yours to hold the balance. One of the scales is quite loaded, take care what you are going to put in the other. Reckon up the number of predestined ones who may be found among the total number of married people, weigh them, and you will then know where the evil is seated.

Let us try to penetrate more deeply into the causes of this conjugal sickliness.

The word love, when applied to the reproduction of the species, is the most hateful blasphemy which modern manners have taught us to utter. Nature, in raising us above the beasts by the divine gift of thought, had rendered us very sensitive to bodily sensations, emotional sentiment, cravings of appetite and passions. This double nature of ours makes of man both an animal and a lover. This distinction gives the key to the social problem which we are considering.

Marriage may be considered in three ways, politically, as well as from a civil and moral point of view: as a law, as a contract and as an institution. As a law, its object is a reproduction of the species; as a contract, it relates to the transmission of property; as an institution, it is a guarantee which all men give and by which all are bound: they have father and mother, and they will have children. Marriage, therefore, ought to be the object of universal respect. Society can only take into consideration those cardinal points, which, from a social point of view, dominate the conjugal question.

Most men have no other views in marrying, than reproduction, property or children; but neither reproduction nor property nor children constitutes happiness. The command, "Increase and multiply," does not imply love. To ask of a young girl whom we have seen fourteen times in fifteen days, to give you love in the name of law, the king and justice, is an absurdity worthy of the majority of the predestined.

Love is the union between natural craving and sentiment; happiness in marriage results in perfect union of soul between a married pair. Hence it follows that in order to be happy a man must feel himself bound by certain rules of honor and delicacy. After having enjoyed the benefit of the social law which consecrates the natural craving, he must obey also the secret laws of nature by which sentiments unfold themselves. If he stakes his happiness on being himself loved, he must himself love sincerely: nothing can resist a genuine passion.

But to feel this passion is always to feel desire. Can a man always desire his wife?

Yes.

It is as absurd to deny that it is possible for a man always to love the same woman, as it would be to affirm that some famous musician needed several violins in order to execute a piece of music or compose a charming melody.

Love is the poetry of the senses. It has the destiny of all that which is great in man and of all that which proceeds from his thought. Either it is sublime, or it is not. When once it exists, it exists forever and goes on always increasing. This is the love which the ancients made the child of heaven and earth.

Literature revolves round seven situations; music expresses everything with seven notes; painting employs but seven colors; like these three arts, love perhaps founds itself on seven principles, but we leave this investigation for the next century to carry out.

If poetry, music and painting have found infinite forms of expression, pleasure should be even more diversified. For in the three arts which aid us in seeking, often with little success, truth by means of analogy, the man stands alone with his imagination, while love is the union of two bodies and of two souls. If the three principal methods upon which we rely for the expression of thought require preliminary study in those whom nature has made poets, musicians or painters, is it not obvious that, in order, to be happy, it is necessary to be initiated into the secrets of pleasure? All men experience the craving for reproduction, as all feel hunger and thirst; but all are not called to be lovers and gastronomists. Our present civilization has proved that taste is a science, and it is only certain privileged beings who have learned how to eat and drink. Pleasure considered as an art is still waiting for its physiologists. As for ourselves, we are contented with pointing out that ignorance of the principles upon which happiness is founded, is the sole cause of that misfortune which is the lot of all the predestined.

It is with the greatest timidity that we venture upon the publication of a few aphorisms which may give birth to this new art, as casts have created the science of geology; and we offer them for the meditation of philosophers, of young marrying people and of the predestined.

CATECHISM OF MARRIAGE

XXVII

Marriage is a science.

XXVIII

A man ought not to marry without having studied anatomy, and dissected at least one woman.

XXIX

The fate of the home depends on the first night.

XXX

A woman deprived of her free will can never have the credit of making a sacrifice.

XXXI

In love, putting aside all consideration of the soul, the heart of a woman is like a lyre which does not reveal its secret, excepting to him who is a skillful player.

XXXII

Independently of any gesture of repulsion, there exists in the soul of all women a sentiment which tends, sooner or later, to proscribe all pleasure devoid of passionate feeling.

XXXIII

The interest of a husband as much as his honor forbids him to indulge a pleasure which he has not had the skill to make his wife desire.

XXXIV

Pleasure being caused by the union of sensation and sentiment, we can say without fear of contradiction that pleasures are a sort of material ideas.

XXXV

As ideas are capable of infinite combination, it ought to be the same with pleasures.

XXXVI

In the life of man there are no two moments of pleasure exactly alike, any more than there are two leaves of identical shape upon the same tree.

XXXVII

If there are differences between one moment of pleasure and another, a man can always be happy with the same woman.

XXXVIII

To seize adroitly upon the varieties of pleasure, to develop them, to impart to them a new style, an original expression, constitutes the genius of a husband.

XXXIX

Between two beings who do not love each other this genius is licentiousness; but the caresses over which love presides are always pure.

XL

The married woman who is the most chaste may be also the most voluptuous.

XLI

The most virtuous woman can be forward without knowing it.

XLII

When two human beings are united by pleasure, all social conventionalities are put aside. This situation conceals a reef on which many vessels are wrecked. A husband is lost, if he once forgets there is a modesty which is quite independent of coverings. Conjugal love ought never either to put on or to take away the bandage of its eyes, excepting at the due season.

XLIII

Power does not consist in striking with force or with frequency, but in striking true.

XLIV

To call a desire into being, to nourish it, to develop it, to bring it to full growth, to excite it, to satisfy it, is a complete poem of itself.

XLV

The progression of pleasures is from the distich to the quatrain, from the quatrain to the sonnet, from the sonnet to the ballad, from the ballad to the ode, from the ode to the cantata, from the cantata to the dithyramb. The husband who commences with dithyramb is a fool.

XLVI

Each night ought to have its *menu*.

XLVII

Marriage must incessantly contend with a monster which devours everything, that is, familiarity.

XLVIII

If a man cannot distinguish the difference between the pleasures of two consecutive nights, he has married too early.

XLIX

It is easier to be a lover than a husband, for the same reason that it is more difficult to be witty every day, than to say bright things from time to time.

L

A husband ought never to be the first to go to sleep and the last to awaken.

LI

The man who enters his wife's dressing-room is either a philosopher or an imbecile.

LII

The husband who leaves nothing to desire is a lost man.

LIII

The married woman is a slave whom one must know how to set upon a throne.

LIV

A man must not flatter himself that he knows his wife, and is making her happy unless he sees her often at his knees.

It is to the whole ignorant troop of our predestined, of our legions of snivelers, of smokers, of snuff-takers, of old and captious men that Sterne addressed, in *Tristram Shandy*, the letter written by Walter Shandy to his brother Toby, when this last proposed to marry the widow Wadman.

These celebrated instructions which the most original of English writers has comprised in this letter, suffice with some few exceptions to complete our observations on the manner in which husbands should behave to their wives; and we offer it in its original form to the reflections of the predestined, begging that they will meditate upon it as one of the most solid masterpieces of human wit.

“MY DEAR BROTHER TOBY,

“What I am going to say to thee is upon the nature of women, and of love-making to them; and perhaps it is as well for thee – tho' not so well for me – that thou hast occasion for a letter of instructions upon that head, and that I am able to write it to thee.

“Had it been the good pleasure of Him who disposes of our lots, and thou no sufferer by the knowledge, I had been well content that thou should'st have dipped the pen this moment into the ink instead of myself; but that not being the case –

Mrs. Shandy being now close beside me, preparing for bed – I have thrown together without order, and just as they have come into my mind, such hints and documents as I deem may be of use to thee; intending, in this, to give thee a token of my love; not doubting, my dear Toby, of the manner in which it will be accepted.

“In the first place, with regard to all which concerns religion in the affair – though I perceive from a glow in my cheek, that I blush as I begin to speak to thee upon the subject, as well knowing, notwithstanding thy unaffected secrecy, how few of its offices thou neglectest – yet I would remind thee of one (during the continuance of thy courtship) in a particular manner, which I would not have omitted; and that is, never to go forth upon the enterprise, whether it be in the morning or in the afternoon, without first recommending thyself to the protection of Almighty God, that He may defend thee from the evil one.

“Shave the whole top of thy crown clean once at least every four or five days, but oftener if convenient; lest in taking off thy wig before her, thro’ absence of mind, she should be able to discover how much has been cut away by Time – how much by Trim.

“‘Twere better to keep ideas of baldness out of her fancy.

“Always carry it in thy mind, and act upon it as a sure maxim, Toby —

“*‘That women are timid.* ‘And ‘tis well they are – else there would be no dealing with them.

“Let not thy breeches be too tight, or hang too loose about thy thighs, like the trunk-hose of our ancestors.

“A just medium prevents all conclusions.

“Whatever thou hast to say, be it more or less, forget not to utter it in a low soft tone of voice. Silence, and whatever approaches it, weaves dreams of midnight secrecy into the brain: For this cause, if thou canst help it, never throw down the tongs and poker.

“Avoid all kinds of pleasantry and facetiousness in thy discourse with her, and do whatever lies in thy power at the same time, to keep from her all books and writings which tend there to: there are some devotional tracts, which if thou canst entice her to read over, it will be well: but suffer her not to look into *Rabelais*, or *Scarron*, or *Don Quixote*.

“They are all books which excite laughter; and thou knowest, dear Toby, that there is no passion so serious as lust.

“Stick a pin in the bosom of thy shirt, before thou enterest her parlor. “And if thou art permitted to sit upon the same sofa with her, and she gives thee occasion to lay thy hand upon hers – beware of taking it – thou canst not lay thy hand upon hers, but she will feel the temper of thine. Leave that and as many other things as thou canst, quite undetermined; by so doing, thou wilt have her curiosity on thy side; and if she is not conquered by that, and thy Asse continues still kicking, which there is great reason to suppose – thou must begin, with first losing a few ounces of blood below the ears, according to the practice of the ancient Scythians, who cured the most intemperate fits of the appetite by that means.

“*Avicenna*, after this, is for having the part anointed with the syrup of hellebore, using proper evacuations and purges – and I believe rightly. But thou must eat little or no goat’s flesh, nor red deer – nor even foal’s flesh by any means; and carefully abstain – that is, as much as thou canst, – from peacocks, cranes, coots, didappers and water-hens.

“As for thy drink – I need not tell thee, it must be the infusion of Vervain and the herb Hanea, of which Aelian relates such effects; but if thy stomach palls with it – discontinue it from time to time, taking cucumbers, melons, purslane, water-lilies, woodbine, and lettuce, in the stead of them.

“There is nothing further for thee, which occurs to me at present

– “Unless the breaking out of a fresh war. – So wishing everything, dear Toby, for the best,

“I rest thy affectionate brother,

“WALTER SHANDY.”

Under the present circumstances Sterne himself would doubtless have omitted from his letter the passage about the ass; and, far from advising the predestined to be bled he would have changed the regimen of cucumbers and lettuces for one eminently substantial. He recommended the exercise of economy, in order to attain to the power of magic liberality in the moment of war, thus imitating the admirable example of the English government, which in time of peace has two hundred ships in commission, but whose shipwrights can, in time of need, furnish double that quantity when it is desirable to scour the sea and carry off a whole foreign navy.

When a man belongs to the small class of those who by a liberal education have been made masters of the domain of thought, he ought always, before marrying, to examine his physical and moral resources. To contend advantageously with the tempest which so many attractions tend to raise in the heart of his wife, a husband ought to possess, besides the science of pleasure and a fortune which saves him from sinking into any class of the predestined, robust health, exquisite tact, considerable intellect, too much good sense to make his superiority felt, excepting on fit occasions, and finally great acuteness of hearing and sight.

If he has a handsome face, a good figure, a manly air, and yet falls short of all these promises, he will sink into the class of the predestined. On the other hand, a husband who is plain in features but has a face full of expression, will find himself, if his wife once forgets his plainness, in a situation most favorable for his struggle against the genius of evil.

He will study (and this is a detail omitted from the letter of Sterne) to give no occasion for his wife’s disgust. Also, he will resort moderately to the use of perfumes, which, however, always expose beauty to injurious suspicions.

He ought as carefully to study how to behave and how to pick out subjects of conversation, as if he were courting the most inconstant of women. It is for him that a philosopher has made the following reflection:

“More than one woman has been rendered unhappy for the rest of her life, has been lost and dishonored by a man whom she has ceased to love, because he took off his coat awkwardly, trimmed one of his nails crookedly, put on a stocking wrong side out, and was clumsy with a button.”

One of the most important of his duties will be to conceal from his wife the real state of his fortune, so that he may satisfy her fancies and caprices as generous celibates are wont to do.

Then the most difficult thing of all, a thing to accomplish which superhuman courage is required, is to exercise the most complete control over the ass of which Sterne speaks. This ass ought to be as submissive as a serf of the thirteenth century was to his lord; to obey and be silent, advance and stop, at the slightest word.

Even when equipped with these advantages, a husband enters the lists with scarcely any hope of success. Like all the rest, he still runs the risk of becoming, for his wife, a sort of responsible editor.

“And why!” will exclaim certain good but small-minded people, whose horizon is limited to the tip of their nose, “why is it necessary to take so much pains in order to love, and why is it necessary to go to school beforehand, in order to be happy in your own home? Does the government intend to institute a professional chair of love, just as it has instituted a chair of law?”

This is our answer:

These multiplied rules, so difficult to deduce, these minute observations, these ideas which vary so as to suit different temperaments, are innate, so to speak, in the heart of those who are born for love; just as his feeling of taste and his indescribable felicity in combining ideas are natural to the soul of the poet, the painter or the musician. The men who would experience any fatigue in putting into practice the instructions given in this Meditation are naturally predestined, just as he who cannot perceive the connection which exists between two different ideas is an imbecile. As a matter of fact, love has its great men although they be unrecognized, as war has its Napoleons, poetry its Andre Cheniers and philosophy its Descartes.

This last observation contains the germ of a true answer to the question which men from time immemorial have been asking: Why are happy marriages so very rare?

This phenomenon of the moral world is rarely met with for the reason that people of genius are rarely met with. A passion which lasts is a sublime drama acted by two performers of equal talent, a drama in which sentiments form the catastrophe, where desires are incidents and the lightest thought brings a change of scene. Now how is it possible, in this herd of bimana which we call a nation, to meet, on any but rare occasions, a man and a woman who possess in the same degree the genius of love, when men of talent are so thinly sown and so rare in all other sciences, in the pursuit of which the artist needs only to understand himself, in order to attain success?

Up to the present moment, we have been confronted with making a forecast of the difficulties, to some degree physical, which two married people have to overcome, in order to be happy; but what a task would be ours if it were necessary to unfold the startling array of moral obligations which spring from their differences in character? Let us cry halt! The man who is skillful enough to guide the temperament will certainly show himself master of the soul of another.

We will suppose that our model husband fulfills the primary conditions necessary, in order that he may dispute or maintain possession of his wife, in spite of all assailants. We will admit that he is not to be reckoned in any of the numerous classes of the predestined which we have passed in review. Let us admit that he has become imbued with the spirit of all our maxims; that he has mastered the admirable science, some of whose precepts we have made known; that he has married wisely, that he knows his wife, that he is loved by her; and let us continue the enumeration of all those general causes which might aggravate the critical situation which we shall represent him as occupying for the instruction of the human race.

MEDITATION VI. OF BOARDING SCHOOLS

If you have married a young lady whose education has been carried on at a boarding school, there are thirty more obstacles to your happiness, added to all those which we have already enumerated, and you are exactly like a man who thrusts his hands into a wasp's nest.

Immediately, therefore, after the nuptial blessing has been pronounced, without allowing yourself to be imposed upon by the innocent ignorance, the frank graces and the modest countenance of your wife, you ought to ponder well and faithfully follow out the axioms and precepts which we shall develop in the second part of this book. You should even put into practice the rigors prescribed in the third part, by maintaining an active surveillance, a paternal solicitude at all hours, for the very day after your marriage, perhaps on the evening of your wedding day, there is danger in the house.

I mean to say that you should call to mind the secret and profound instruction which the pupils have acquired *de natura rerum*, – of the nature of things. Did Lapeyrouse, Cook or Captain Peary ever show so much ardor in navigating the ocean towards the Poles as the scholars of the Lycee do in approaching forbidden tracts in the ocean of pleasure? Since girls are more cunning, cleverer and more curious than boys, their secret meetings and their conversations, which all the art of their teachers cannot check, are necessarily presided over by a genius a thousand times more informal than that of college boys. What man has ever heard the moral reflections and the corrupting confidences of these young girls? They alone know the sports at which honor is lost in advance, those essays in pleasure, those promptings in voluptuousness, those imitations of bliss, which may be compared to the thefts made by greedy children from a dessert which is locked up. A girl may come forth from her boarding school a virgin, but never chaste. She will have discussed, time and time again at secret meetings, the important question of lovers, and corruption will necessarily have overcome her heart or her spirit.

Nevertheless, we will admit that your wife has not participated in these virginal delights, in these premature deviltries. Is she any better because she has never had any voice in the secret councils of grown-up girls? No! She will, in any case, have contracted a friendship with other young ladies, and our computation will be modest, if we attribute to her no more than two or three intimate friends. Are you certain that after your wife has left boarding school, her young friends have not there been admitted to those confidences, in which an attempt is made to learn in advance, at least by analogy, the pastimes of doves? And then her friends will marry; you will have four women to watch instead of one, four characters to divine, and you will be at the mercy of four husbands and a dozen celibates, of whose life, principles and habits you are quite ignorant, at a time when our meditations have revealed to you certain coming of a day when you will have your hands full with the people whom you married with your wife. Satan alone could have thought of placing a girl's boarding school in the middle of a large town! Madame Campan had at least the wisdom to set up her famous institution at Ecoeu. This sensible precaution proved that she was no ordinary woman. There, her young ladies did not gaze upon the picture gallery of the streets, the huge and grotesque figures and the obscene words drawn by some evil-spirited pencil. They had not perpetually before their eyes the spectacle of human infirmities exhibited at every barrier in France, and treacherous book-stalls did not vomit out upon them in secret the poison of books which taught evil and set passion on fire. This wise school-mistress, moreover, could only at Ecoeu preserve a young lady for you spotless and pure, if, even there, that were possible. Perhaps you hope to find no difficulty in preventing your wife from seeing her school friends? What folly! She will meet them at the ball, at the theatre, out walking and in the world at large; and how many services two friends can render each other! But we will meditate upon this new subject of alarm in its proper place and order.

Nor is this all; if your mother-in-law sent her daughter to a boarding school, do you believe that this was out of solicitude for her daughter? A girl of twelve or fifteen is a terrible Argus; and if

your mother-in-law did not wish to have an Argus in her house I should be inclined to suspect that your mother-in-law belonged undoubtedly to the most shady section of our honest women. She will, therefore, prove for her daughter on every occasion either a deadly example or a dangerous adviser.

Let us stop here! – The mother-in-law requires a whole Meditation for herself.

So that, whichever way you turn, the bed of marriage, in this connection, is equally full of thorns.

Before the Revolution, several aristocratic families used to send their daughters to the convent. This example was followed by a number of people who imagined that in sending their daughters to a school where the daughters of some great noblemen were sent, they would assume the tone and manners of aristocrats. This delusion of pride was, from the first, fatal to domestic happiness; for the convents had all the disadvantages of other boarding schools. The idleness that prevailed there was more terrible. The cloister bars inflame the imagination. Solitude is a condition very favorable to the devil; and one can scarcely imagine what ravages the most ordinary phenomena of life are able to leave in the soul of these young girls, dreamy, ignorant and unoccupied.

Some of them, by reason of their having indulged idle fancies, are led into curious blunders. Others, having indulged in exaggerated ideas of married life, say to themselves, as soon as they have taken a husband, “What! Is this all?” In every way, the imperfect instruction, which is given to girls educated in common, has in it all the danger of ignorance and all the unhappiness of science.

A young girl brought up at home by her mother or by her virtuous, bigoted, amiable or cross-grained old aunt; a young girl, whose steps have never crossed the home threshold without being surrounded by chaperons, whose laborious childhood has been wearied by tasks, albeit they were profitless, to whom in short everything is a mystery, even the Seraphin puppet show, is one of those treasures which are met with, here and there in the world, like woodland flowers surrounded by brambles so thick that mortal eye cannot discern them. The man who owns a flower so sweet and pure as this, and leaves it to be cultivated by others, deserves his unhappiness a thousand times over. He is either a monster or a fool.

And if in the preceding Meditation we have succeeded in proving to you that by far the greater number of men live in the most absolute indifference to their personal honor, in the matter of marriage, is it reasonable to believe that any considerable number of them are sufficiently rich, sufficiently intellectual, sufficiently penetrating to waste, like Burchell in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, one or two years in studying and watching the girls whom they mean to make their wives, when they pay so little attention to them after conjugal possession during that period of time which the English call the honeymoon, and whose influence we shall shortly discuss?

Since, however, we have spent some time in reflecting upon this important matter, we would observe that there are many methods of choosing more or less successfully, even though the choice be promptly made.

It is, for example, beyond doubt that the probabilities will be in your favor:

I. If you have chosen a young lady whose temperament resembles that of the women of Louisiana or the Carolinas.

To obtain reliable information concerning the temperament of a young person, it is necessary to put into vigorous operation the system which Gil Blas prescribes, in dealing with chambermaids, a system employed by statesmen to discover conspiracies and to learn how the ministers have passed the night.

II. If you choose a young lady who, without being plain, does not belong to the class of pretty women.

We regard it as an infallible principle that great sweetness of disposition united in a woman with plainness that is not repulsive, form two indubitable elements of success in securing the greatest possible happiness to the home.

But would you learn the truth? Open your Rousseau; for there is not a single question of public morals whose trend he has not pointed out in advance. Read:

“Among people of fixed principles the girls are careless, the women severe; the contrary is the case among people of no principle.”

To admit the truth enshrined in this profound and truthful remark is to conclude, that there would be fewer unhappy marriages if men wedded their mistresses. The education of girls requires, therefore, important modifications in France. Up to this time French laws and French manners instituted to distinguish between a misdemeanor and a crime, have encouraged crime. In reality the fault committed by a young girl is scarcely ever a misdemeanor, if you compare it with that committed by the married woman. Is there any comparison between the danger of giving liberty to girls and that of allowing it to wives? The idea of taking a young girl on trial makes more serious men think than fools laugh. The manners of Germany, of Switzerland, of England and of the United States give to young ladies such rights as in France would be considered the subversion of all morality; and yet it is certain that in these countries there are fewer unhappy marriages than in France.

LV

“Before a woman gives herself entirely up to her lover, she ought to consider well what his love has to offer her. The gift of her esteem and confidence should necessarily precede that of her heart.”

Sparkling with truth as they are, these lines probably filled with light the dungeon, in the depths of which Mirabeau wrote them; and the keen observation which they bear witness to, although prompted by the most stormy of his passions, has none the less influence even now in solving the social problem on which we are engaged. In fact, a marriage sealed under the auspices of the religious scrutiny which assumes the existence of love, and subjected to the atmosphere of that disenchantment which follows on possession, ought naturally to be the most firmly-welded of all human unions.

A woman then ought never to reproach her husband for the legal right, in virtue of which she belongs to him. She ought not to find in this compulsory submission any excuse for yielding to a lover, because some time after her marriage she has discovered in her own heart a traitor whose sophisms seduce her by asking twenty times an hour, “Wherefore, since she has been given against her will to a man whom she does not love, should she not give herself, of her own free-will, to a man whom she does love.” A woman is not to be tolerated in her complaints concerning faults inseparable from human nature. She has, in advance, made trial of the tyranny which they exercise, and taken sides with the caprices which they exhibit.

A great many young girls are likely to be disappointed in their hopes of love! – But will it not be an immense advantage to them to have escaped being made the companions of men whom they would have had the right to despise?

Certain alarmists will exclaim that such an alteration in our manners would bring about a public dissoluteness which would be frightful; that the laws, and the customs which prompt the laws, could not after all authorize scandal and immorality; and if certain unavoidable abuses do exist, at least society ought not to sanction them.

It is easy to say, in reply, first of all, that the proposed system tends to prevent those abuses which have been hitherto regarded as incapable of prevention; but, the calculations of our statistics, inexact as they are, have invariably pointed out a widely prevailing social sore, and our moralists may, therefore, be accused of preferring the greater to the lesser evil, the violation of the principle on which society is constituted, to the granting of a certain liberty to girls; and dissoluteness in mothers of families, such as poisons the springs of public education and brings unhappiness upon at least four persons, to dissoluteness in a young girl, which only affects herself or at the most a child besides. Let

the virtue of ten virgins be lost rather than forfeit this sanctity of morals, that crown of honor with which the mother of a family should be invested! In the picture presented by a young girl abandoned by her betrayer, there is something imposing, something indescribably sacred; here we see oaths violated, holy confidences betrayed, and on the ruins of a too facile virtue innocence sits in tears, doubting everything, because compelled to doubt the love of a father for his child. The unfortunate girl is still innocent; she may yet become a faithful wife, a tender mother, and, if the past is mantled in clouds, the future is blue as the clear sky. Shall we not find these tender tints in the gloomy pictures of loves which violate the marriage law? In the one, the woman is the victim, in the other, she is a criminal. What hope is there for the unfaithful wife? If God pardons the fault, the most exemplary life cannot efface, here below, its living consequences. If James I was the son of Rizzio, the crime of Mary lasted as long as did her mournful though royal house, and the fall of the Stuarts was the justice of God.

But in good faith, would the emancipation of girls set free such a host of dangers?

It is very easy to accuse a young person for suffering herself to be deceived, in the desire to escape, at any price, from the condition of girlhood; but such an accusation is only just in the present condition of our manners. At the present day, a young person knows nothing about seduction and its snares, she relies altogether upon her weakness, and mingling with this reliance the convenient maxims of the fashionable world, she takes as her guide while under the control of those desires which everything conspires to excite, her own deluding fancies, which prove a guide all the more treacherous, because a young girl rarely ever confides to another the secret thoughts of her first love.

If she were free, an education free from prejudices would arm her against the love of the first comer. She would, like any one else, be very much better able to meet dangers of which she knew, than perils whose extent had been concealed from her. And, moreover, is it necessary for a girl to be any the less under the watchful eye of her mother, because she is mistress of her own actions? Are we to count as nothing the modesty and the fears which nature has made so powerful in the soul of a young girl, for the very purpose of preserving her from the misfortune of submitting to a man who does not love her? Again, what girl is there so thoughtless as not to discern, that the most immoral man wishes his wife to be a woman of principle, as masters desire their servants to be perfect; and that, therefore, her virtue is the richest and the most advantageous of all possessions?

After all, what is the question before us? For what do you think we are stipulating? We are making a claim for five or six hundred thousand maidens, protected by their instinctive timidity, and by the high price at which they rate themselves; they understand how to defend themselves, just as well as they know how to sell themselves. The eighteen millions of human beings, whom we have excepted from this consideration, almost invariably contract marriages in accordance with the system which we are trying to make paramount in our system of manners; and as to the intermediary classes by which we poor bimana are separated from the men of privilege who march at the head of a nation, the number of castaway children which these classes, although in tolerably easy circumstances, consign to misery, goes on increasing since the peace, if we may believe M. Benoiston de Chateauneuf, one of the most courageous of those savants who have devoted themselves to the arid yet useful study of statistics. We may guess how deep-seated is the social hurt, for which we propound a remedy, if we reckon the number of natural children which statistics reveal, and the number of illicit adventures whose evidence in high society we are forced to suspect. But it is difficult here to make quite plain all the advantages which would result from the emancipation of young girls. When we come to observe the circumstances which attend a marriage, such as our present manners approve of, judicious minds must appreciate the value of that system of education and liberty, which we demand for young girls, in the name of reason and nature. The prejudice which we in France entertain in favor of the virginity of brides is the most silly of all those which still survive among us. The Orientals take their brides without distressing themselves about the past and lock them up in order to be more certain about the future; the French put their daughters into a sort of seraglio defended by their mothers, by prejudice,

and by religious ideas, and give the most complete liberty to their wives, thus showing themselves much more solicitous about a woman's past than about her future. The point we are aiming at is to bring about a reversal of our system of manners. If we did so we should end, perhaps, by giving to faithful married life all the flavor and the piquancy which women of to-day find in acts of infidelity.

But this discussion would take us far from our subject, if it led us to examine, in all its details, the vast improvement in morals which doubtless will distinguish twentieth century France; for morals are reformed only very gradually! Is it not necessary, in order to produce the slightest change, that the most daring dreams of the past century become the most trite ideas of the present one? We have touched upon this question merely in a trifling mood, for the purposes of showing that we are not blind to its importance, and of bequeathing also to posterity the outline of a work, which they may complete. To speak more accurately there is a third work to be composed; the first concerns courtesans, while the second is the physiology of pleasure!

“When there are ten of us, we cross ourselves.”

In the present state of our morals and of our imperfect civilization, a problem crops up which for the moment is insoluble, and which renders superfluous all discussion on the art of choosing a wife; we commend it, as we have done all the others, to the meditation of philosophers.

PROBLEM

It has not yet been decided whether a wife is forced into infidelity by the impossibility of obtaining any change, or by the liberty which is allowed her in this connection.

Moreover, as in this work we pitch upon a man at the moment that he is newly married, we declare that if he has found a wife of sanguine temperament, of vivid imagination, of a nervous constitution or of an indolent character, his situation cannot fail to be extremely serious.

A man would find himself in a position of danger even more critical if his wife drank nothing but water [see the Meditation entitled *Conjugal Hygiene*]; but if she had some talent for singing, or if she were disposed to take cold easily, he should tremble all the time; for it must be remembered that women who sing are at least as passionate as women whose mucous membrane shows extreme delicacy.

Again, this danger would be aggravated still more if your wife were less than seventeen; or if, on the other hand, her general complexion were pale and dull, for this sort of woman is almost always artificial.

But we do not wish to anticipate here any description of the terrors which threaten husbands from the symptoms of unhappiness which they read in the character of their wives. This digression has already taken us too far from the subject of boarding schools, in which so many catastrophes are hatched, and from which issue so many young girls incapable of appreciating the painful sacrifices by which the honest man who does them the honor of marrying them, has obtained opulence; young girls eager for the enjoyments of luxury, ignorant of our laws, ignorant of our manners, claim with avidity the empire which their beauty yields them, and show themselves quite ready to turn away from the genuine utterances of the heart, while they readily listen to the buzzing of flattery.

This Meditation should plant in the memory of all who read it, even those who merely open the book for the sake of glancing at it or distracting their mind, an intense repugnance for young women educated in a boarding school, and if it succeeds in doing so, its services to the public will have already proved considerable.

MEDITATION VII. OF THE HONEYMOON

If our meditations prove that it is almost impossible for a married woman to remain virtuous in France, our enumeration of the celibates and the predestined, our remarks upon the education of girls, and our rapid survey of the difficulties which attend the choice of a wife will explain up to a certain point this national frailty. Thus, after indicating frankly the aching malady under which the social slate is laboring, we have sought for the causes in the imperfection of the laws, in the irrational condition of our manners, in the incapacity of our minds, and in the contradictions which characterize our habits. A single point still claims our observation, and that is the first onslaught of the evil we are confronting.

We reach this first question on approaching the high problems suggested by the honeymoon; and although we find here the starting point of all the phenomena of married life, it appears to us to be the brilliant link round which are clustered all our observations, our axioms, our problems, which have been scattered deliberately among the wise quips which our loquacious meditations retail. The honeymoon would seem to be, if we may use the expression, the apogee of that analysis to which we must apply ourselves, before engaging in battle our two imaginary champions.

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